

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Also by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar

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Edited by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar

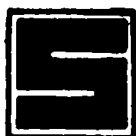
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K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

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Indian Writing in English

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To
Professor A. Norman Jeffares
and
Mrs. Jeanne Jeffares

Preface to Fourth Edition

The Third Edition, with a 75-page Postscript Chapter, appeared last year, and the ready welcome it received (the Second Edition had been out of print for almost a decade) has made necessary the issue of the present Fourth Edition. In this edition, the Bibliography has been brought up up-to-date, and the Index completely revised and recast to cover the Postscript Chapter also.

The Publishers are thankful to the National Book Trust for making possible the issue of this Popular Edition.

**K.R.S.I.
PN**

Preface to Third Edition

The first and second editions of this book appeared in 1962 and 1973 respectively. The first edition itself had come in the wake of my P.E.N. monograph, *Indo-Anglian Literature* (1943), and *The Indian Contribution to English Literature* (1945). Even earlier, I had for over a decade been writing in journals off and on about the Indo-Anglians. I may say then, the present work has been 50 years a-growing.

Since the publication of the second edition, there has been witnessed a burst of activity in Indian writing in English and something akin to a global proliferation of interest in this new literature. A mere reissue, I thought, would hardly serve the purpose. But I felt also that the time hadn't come for any drastic revaluations. Many of the older writers have survived triumphantly, and there have been significant new arrivals as well. The long 'Postscript Chapter' is meant to cover the last 10 years, and bring the survey up-to-date,

In writing the 'Postscript Chapter', I have taken the help of my daughter, Prema Nandakumar, whose annual surveys have appeared in Sahitya Akademi's journal, *Indian Literature*. She has besides surveyed the literature of the seventies, as also Indian writing in English since Independence. Sentences from our articles and book-reviews elsewhere have been here and there incorporated in the 'Postscript Chapter' which, although designed as a supplement to the main survey, can also stand on its own as an assessment of Indian writing in English during the decade it won general recognition as a distinctive literature of India.

I am grateful to Shri O.P. Ghai of Sterling Publishers for the buoyancy and faith with which he has taken up the publication of this new edition.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar

5 June 1982

Preface to Second Edition

Since the first edition of this book was published early in 1962, the subject has been gaining increasing recognition as well as importance, not only in Indian universities but in many foreign (especially American) universities as well. It is now offered as a compulsory or elective paper at the M A. level in quite a few universities, and students of research are being drawn to it more and more as to a virgin field. At Andhra University, where I gave the course to postgraduate students for several years, I was gratified to find that the subject evoked a lively interest which seemed to go far beyond the immediate preoccupation with the university examination, and some of my colleagues too were tempted to explore the ramifications of the subject. I have also been receiving numerous inquiries from research students, some working at distant centres: for example, Dushanbe in Russia! As against this welcome proliferation of interest in the subject, the book has been unfortunately out of print for nearly eight years, and while I thought that a mere reprint wouldn't serve the purpose, I was unable to find the time for preparing a revised edition owing to my preoccupation with other literary work or with academic administration. It was only in December 1968, after I had resigned the Vice-Chancellorship of Andhra University and taken residence in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi, that I felt free at last to undertake the revision of the book. On the other hand I found that, if I had the necessary leisure and freedom from fret and worry, I was also suddenly cut off from facilities like secretarial assistance and (what was even more important) ready access to a University library, and even my own library had by then been scattered. There was, however, the silent support from my wife, Padmasani; my daughter, Prema Nandakumar, who has been for the past many years contributing annual surveys of Indian Writing in English to Sahitya Akademi's

Indian Literature, was a source of unfailing assistance; and Dr. V. Panduranga Rao, a former student, helped me with the loan of books, and we had also some fruitful discussions, especially on the novelists. I was thus able to begin the work of revision in March 1969, and completed it in the course of the next six months. With a view to making my survey more comprehensive and up-to-date, I had to add six new chapters besides augmenting the matter in the others. Even so, the printing of this second edition could be taken up only in 1970, and there have been other unforeseen delays too, and this time-lag between the preparation of the 'copy' and the actual printing unavoidably caused certain lacunae which could only be partly rectified at the proof-reading stage. Nevertheless, I hope that this edition is a fuller and more balanced survey of Indian Writing in English than its predecessor of a decade ago.

The earlier edition was widely reviewed and welcomed both in India and abroad, and there was even a long appreciative review in *Hellkon: Világirodalmi Figyelo* from Budapest. I am grateful to the reviewers and others who have pointed out errors of omission or commission, which I have tried to set right in the present edition. I have also been castigated for being too generous in my praise of certain writers, for apportioning less or more space to this or that author, and even for including in my survey some of the writers who happen to figure in it. I have given due consideration to these animadversion, though I haven't been able always to abide by them. Without going into needless detail, I will here generally deal with certain broad issues raised by critics, whether of Indo-Anglian literature or of my book.

In the first place, as regards the question whether Indians should at all attempt creative writing in English, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand has reported that Gandhiji himself once told him: "The purpose of writing is to communicate, isn't it? If so, say your say in any language that comes to hand". In a certain situation, a language chooses the man as much as the man chooses a language. Many in India have used English creatively in the past, and it looks as though this will continue. "Indian-English writing", says Dr. Anand, "has come to stay as part of world literature". And it would be wise to accept this fact, rather than try to make it an ideological issue.

In the second place, mine is a modest exercise in literary history, and not a demonstration of the "new" criticism. My aim is to convey information, cover as much ground as possible, and generally to stimulate intelligent interest in the subject. In a recent issue of *Universitas* (XIII. 3: 1971), Professor Robert Minder posed the question "How does one become a literary historian and why?", and remarked that literature "remains a granary of gigantic proportions and... granaries require personnel, administrators, accountants and men who take note of facts, and attend to texts and biographies and devise catalogue... Wherefore a history of literature? In order to roam ever anew through its landscapes, to penetrate into its most remote recesses, to explore its glens and to gather corn for the granary". In a desultory and intermittent activity spread over forty years. I seem to have been engaged in this kind of garnering in respect of Indian writing in English. I hope some day a team of dedicated scholars, sustained for a long enough period by adequate grants, would be able to produce a truly authoritative history of this literature. But mine has been almost exclusively an individualist adventure, with all the incidental drawbacks no doubt, but perhaps also with the advantage of a single sensibility (however imperfect) covering the entire field.

In the third place, the double fact that Indo-Anglian literature is an all-India phenomenon and is an offshoot as well as recordation of the modern Indian renaissance must give a survey like this the slant of a cultural history. Most of the builders and makers of modern India from the time of Raja Rammohan Roy figure in its pages, and since many of the creative writers in the regional languages have been purposively bi-lingual, they too cast their reflected light on this literary history. In the result, a history of Indo-Anglian literature inevitably becomes something more than the survey of one of the 15 or 20 literatures flourishing in contemporary India. If English is admittedly a link-language in India today, Indian Writing in English, besides being a distinctive literature in its own right, is also a link-literature in the context of India's pluralistic literary landscape.

In the fourth place, "literary criticism" not being an exact science, the responses of different people to a poem or novel or drama—even of the same person at different times—must

be far from identical. Linguistics, stylistics, and the collateral disciplines, albeit superlatively sophisticated, cannot quite pluck the heart of the mystery of literary creation or appreciation. The Sanskrit word *sahridaya* is more to the point than the English word "critic", and in any case the task of "judging" literature, whether old or new, is no neat computer-operation but rather calls for total knowledge, integrity and humility. "Like the Kingdom of God on earth", says Allen Tate, "literary criticism is perpetually necessary and, in the very nature of its middle position between imagination and philosophy, perpetually impossible". One has to make an honest effort in almost a prayerful mood—and hope for the best. I am thus not unduly disturbed by the criticism that I have been too lavish with my praises. It is also a curious circumstance that where an author-reviewer finds fault with me, it is never because I have overpraised *him*, but only because I am supposed to have overpraised *others*. Which proves again how tricky and subjective this business of "criticism" is and how great is the need for integrity and humility on the part of the literary historian and critic.

In the fifth place, the constant challenge to us is to see things both in their uniqueness and in their inter-relatedness to everything else. This applies to literature as much as to any other phenomenon. A poem or a novel or a drama has its autonomy certainly, but it has also filiations with the whole living and growing organism that is "literature". And Indo-Anglian literature has likewise its own distinctiveness, but also challenges comparison with contemporary Indian literature in the divers living languages of India, with English, American, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand literature, and with African, Caribbean, Pakistani, Ceylonese or Malaysian literature in English. Certain themes in their variations recur in all Indian literature, in all Commonwealth literature, and even in all literature. What is like and what is unlike, what is local and what is universal, what is of tradition and what is experimental, what is inhibited and what is wholly spontaneous, the impetus of their interactions can make comparative literature a tantalising as well as fascinating study. In my book *Two Cheers for the Commonwealth* (1969), I have attempted certain hesitant soundings and forays, but the prospect is really immense.

And we might perhaps be able to appreciate and place

Indo-Anglian literature with more assurance if we had a closer acquaintance with varieties of English literature in the Commonwealth, and with varieties of literature in the Indian subcontinent. Again, the need for humility is endless.

It is now a pleasure and a duty to thank the many writers whom I have quoted, sometimes on a liberal scale, in the course of the book; in a pioneering survey like mine, this has become necessary. The usual complaint I hear is that many of the books mentioned by me are not easily accessible. Professor William Walsh of the University of Leeds once jocularly asked me whether I had not actually invented many of my authors! But book publishing in India is at last getting to be just a little better organised than before, and under Professor P. Lal's initiative and drive the "Writers Workshop Books" already number over 100. It is to be hoped that the National Book Trust and some of our enterprising private publishers would be able to issue reprints of the earlier "classics" of this literature, lest Professor Walsh's quip turn out to be true indeed after a fashion. Lal Behari Day's *Govindo Samanta*, *Folk Tales* and 'Recollections of My School days'—published almost a century ago—have recently been reissued as an omnibus volume with the help of a subsidy from the Government of West Bengal. The Union Ministry of Education and the various State Governments should be willing to subsidise likewise the reissue of other classics of the nineteenth century and the earlier decades of the twentieth. Writers like Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Behramji Malabari, Nagesh Wishwanath Pai, A. Madhaviiah and K. S. Venkataramani are among the many who would be enabled to get a new lease of life if they could be republished today.

24 November, 1972

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar

Preface to First Edition

During January-March 1959, I gave a 'course' on Indo-Anglian Literature to post-graduate students of the Department of English Literature in the University of Leeds. Some of the Indian college teachers who were then taking a Diploma Course in English in the University of Leeds and some of the members of the teaching staff of the Department of English Literature also regularly attended my talks. I spoke conversationally with the help of notes and books, and the talks were often exploratory in character. Later, while I was still in Leeds I wrote out twelve of the talks, and four of these have since been published in magazines in India, and the first has been issued (in a somewhat abridged form) as a separate booklet. A few months ago, however, I took up my old notes again and wrote out the remaining nine talks as well, bringing them up-to-date wherever possible. Although there is thus some new matter and some reshuffling, the following pages are nevertheless substantially what I said (or tried to say) in 1959 to my biweekly seminar groups in the University of Leeds.

I have no doubt spoken and written on this subject before,—this being a field I have been cultivating off and on for the last thirty years,—but none the less this is practically a new book. I reread most of the literature once again before talking about it at Leeds, and I did not hesitate to change or modify the views expressed earlier by me if I found that such a revaluation was called for. On the other hand, considerations of space have compelled me to devote much less attention to certain authors and categories of writing that have been discussed more in detail in my two earlier books, *Indo-Anglian Literature* (1943) and *The Indian Contribution to English Literature* (1945). In a 'course' like this criticism is apt to fuse disconcertingly with biography, and literary history with political and cultural history, and I have tried to bear in mind the implications of this intimate intermingling of literature and life.

An undertaking like this would have been impossible but for large-hearted cooperation and encouragement from various quarters. Several of the authors discussed in these pages happen to be friends of many years' standing and by making loans or gifts of their books and by according permission to me to quote from their works have greatly facilitated the writing and publication of this book. To Madame Sophia Wadia, Editor of the *Indian P.E.N.*, I am especially indebted for her generous understanding over a period of twenty-five years and for many assignments which have helped to keep alive my interest in this subject. I have incorporated sentences and an occasional para or two from reviews and articles of mine that have appeared in papers like the *Hindu*, the *Hindustan Times*, the *Sunday Standard*, the *Indian P.E.N.*, the *Aryan Path* and *Mother India* and my acknowledgements are due to their editors.

It is a pleasure also to record my obligations to Sir Charles R. Morris, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds, who extended the invitation to me to lecture in his University for a term as Visiting Professor of Indo-Anglian Literature; to the British Council, London, for the award of a travel grant; to my hosts in Leeds,—and especially to Prof. and Mrs. Jeffares, Mr. D.W. Jefferson, Prof. G. Wilson Knight, Dr. Arnold and Mrs. Kettle, and Mr. Michael Millgate,—who helped to make my life there comfortable in every way; to Mr. Allen Tate, then Visiting Professor of American Literature, with whom I was privileged to spend many memorable evenings; to Miss Audrey Stead, Secretary to the Department of English Literature, whose quiet efficiency I could not help admiring and exploiting; and to the loyal group of post-graduate students and others who followed me patiently as I traced the 'history' of Indo-Anglian Literature from Rammohan Roy to the present day.

While the book was in the press, my daughter, Prema Nandakumar, readily shared the burden of proof-reading, while my son, S. Ambirajan, sent me valuable bibliographical notes from London; and my thanks are due to them both.

K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

25 October, 1961

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Introduction¹

My first duty this evening is to thank your Vice-Chancellor and Professor Jeffares of the Department of English Literature for honouring me with the invitation to be your guest for a few weeks and give a course of lectures on Indo-Anglian literature. Your decision to start in your university courses in the various literatures produced in English in the Commonwealth countries and to inaugurate this commendable project with the present series of lectures on Indian Writing in English came to me—as to many of my friends in India—as a pleasant surprise. And having visited your beautiful country once before—and spent a couple of days in your city, meeting Professors Dobree and Orton, giving a lecture at the St. Matthews Parochial Hall, and exploring the Bronte country—I was ready enough to accept your invitation, even though I wasn't very hopeful about my own ability to 'deliver the goods' here. The award of a travel grant from the British Council—who I may now recall with gratitude were my hosts in 1951—finally clinched the matter, and so I am here in your midst today, and am happy to be here. The project that you have embarked upon and in which I find myself so agreeably involved is a most interesting development in Commonwealth Studies and must help to promote mutual understanding between the members of the Commonwealth. We in the Commonwealth are many though we speak, so to say, one language. In India, on the other hand, we wish to believe that we are one nation, though actually we speak a dozen different languages. It should be easier still, then, to get the Commonwealth to a realization of its common aims, common ideals and common heritage. One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin, but it is in literature that the heart-beats of a nation are heard, and it is through the medium of a commonly

¹ Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Leeds on 19 January 1959.

inspired and shared literature that we can exchange pulses as it were, and realize that, while the differences are on the surface, the sense of unity flows as in an underground river and we duly receive the baptism of rebirth into the fellowship of a humane faith.

In the early years of the present century, a young man named E. F. Oaten won a prize at Cambridge with an essay on Anglo-Indian Literature—a pioneering effort—and later published it as a book, and also contributed a chapter on the subject to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. He mainly confined himself to the writings of Englishmen in India on Indian themes, and his was a comprehensive as well as a critical survey. Years later, Professor P. Seshadri gave a lecture at the Osmania University on Anglo-Indian Poetry, and included both English writers on Indian subjects and Indian writing in English; so did Dr. Bhupal Singh in his *Anglo-Indian Fiction*. During the last War, Mr. George Sampson, in the section on Anglo-Indian Literature in his *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, also mentioned Indian writers of English. In all these surveys 'Anglo-Indian' literature has no racial significance at all; it means merely that this literature is a product of Indo-English literary relations. England and India had come together, or had been accidentally thrown together; and out of their intimacy—whether legitimate or illegitimate—had come this singular offspring that is Anglo-Indian literature!

Unfortunately, the word 'Anglo-Indian' has also a racial connotation; Eurasian, Anglo-Indian—these words are sometimes used with a snigger and evoke 'chee-chee' feeling; and the so-called Anglo-Indians themselves are not now anxious to retain this name, and are happily content to merge with the Indians or the Pakistanis. And it was not the Anglo-Indians in this narrow sense that created the main body of Anglo-Indian literature.

Now although Americans, Australians, Canadians and South Africans write in English, their creative work is described, not simply as English literature, but as American, Australian, Canadian or South African literature. The Englishmen who once spent long years in India and attempted creative expression through English, in other words, men like Sir William Jones, John Leyden, Sir Edwin Arnold, Meadows Taylor, F. W. Bain—were a class apart; we shall not see their like again and there

should be no harm in continuing to describe them as Anglo-Indian writers. But the work of a Kipling or a Forster belongs properly to English literature, just as Pearl Buck and Louis Bromfield, even when they choose to write about India, should be classed only as American writers.

How, then, about Indians writing in English? How shall we describe Indian creative writing in English? Of course, it is Indian literature, even as the work of a Thoreau or a Hemingway is American literature. But Indian literature comprises several literatures—Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Panjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, not to mention Sanskrit, for people continue to write in it though the readers are few and far between—and Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as the others. As the late C. R. Reddy pointed out in the course of his Foreword to my P.E.N. book on Indo-Anglian literature:

Indo-Anglian literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian literature. It is a part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history, ever increasingly up to the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghose, and bids fair to expand with our and humanity's expanding future.

On the other hand, 'Indo-Anglian' strikes many as a not altogether happy expression. It is sometimes said that I concocted this expression, and I have accordingly been chastised for it. Actually, it was used as early as 1883 to describe a volume printed in Calcutta containing "Specimen Compositions from Native Students". It was later freely used (among others, by myself also) in the twenties and thirties in reviews and articles. I merely gave general currency to the name when, in 1943, I adopted it as the title of my first book on the subject, the handbook (already referred to) written for the P.E.N. All-India Centre. In another book, *Literature and Authorship in India*, published at about the same time in London, 'Indo-Anglian' was printed by mistake as 'Indo-Anglican'. It was wartime, and the book had been printed off without the proofs being passed by me. To the printer my

'Indo-Anglian' had evidently appeared an odd expression, and on his own authority he had changed it to 'Indo-Anglican'. This evoked a lively protest in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* of 14 November 1943 by 'Autolycus':

To me so curious an adjective can only connote something connected with the Church of England in India. 'Anglican' cannot, and surely never could, be treated as a variant of the word 'English' The word is worse than 'Anglo-Indian' which has at least acquired a new meaning since it was officially recognized as the modern equivalent of Eurasian.

I wrote explaining the circumstances, and in a subsequent issue 'Autolycus' condoned the lapse and expressed himself in favour of 'Indo-Anglian', the expression I had actually used. Still I know many are allergic to the expression 'Indo-Anglian', and some would prefer 'Indo-English'. The advantage with 'Indo-Anglian' is that it can be used both as adjective and as substantive, but 'Indo-Englishman' would be unthinkable. 'Indo-Anglian' is reasonably handy and descriptive, and serves our purpose well enough.

All this is, perhaps, a pointless discussion. After all, what is in a name? Let us therefore draw a little closer and have a look at the thing itself.

It is legitimate to view Indo-Anglian literature as a curious native eruption, an expression of the practical no less than creative genius of the Indian people. Indians have written—and are writing—in English for communicating with one another and with the outside world, for achieving self-expression too artistically, using English, if necessary, or necessarily, in an Indian way. While trying to assess the value of Indo-Anglian poetry in the course of my book, *The Indian Contribution to English Literature*, I happened to remark:

The best Indo-Anglian poets have given us something which neither English poetry nor any of our regional literatures can give; in other words, they have effected a true marriage of Indian processes of poetic experience with English formulae of verse expression.

This prompted Professor N. K. Sidhanta, who reviewed the book in the *Aryan Path*, to ask:

- (1) Can we think of poetic experience as universal and/or national; (2) To what extent are any particular formulae of verse expression better suited for one type of poetic experience than for another; (3) What is the nature of the discipline to which the poet subjects himself when he chooses to express his feelings in verse rather than in prose; (4) Is the discipline more rigid and rigorous when the writer chooses the verse-forms of a language other than his mother-tongue?

A mouthful of questions, and rather frightening, but helpful also if one is engaged in exploring a new literature and assessing its significances. Sir Edmund Gosse, after reading Sarojini's first efforts in poetry, entreated her "to write no more about robins and skylarks, in a landscape of our Midland counties . . . but to describe the flowers, the fruits, the trees, to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid populations of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province". To be Indian in thought and feeling and emotion and experience, yet also to court the graces and submit to the discipline of English for expression, is a novel experiment in creative mutation. There are successes as well as failures, and the failures are perhaps more numerous than the successes. All the same there are the men and women (necessarily few) who have bravely run the race and reached the goal and they deserve due recognition.

It is no less legitimate to look upon Indo-Anglian literature merely as a minor tributary of English literature. Does it take its riches (such as they are) to the main stream, or does it rather—like a canal—draw its continuing inspiration from the parent river? It is a nice question, and there is something to be said for both points of view. Indian writing in English (not in English alone, but *all* Indian writing) is greatly influenced by writing in England, and we have had our own 'Romantics', 'Victorians', 'Georgians', and 'modernists'. But in its own way Indo-Anglian literature too has contributed to the common pool of world writing in English—the major partners in the enterprise being no doubt British literature and American literature. In an article entitled 'England is Abroad', a writer in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 18 April 1958 pointed out that "the centre of gravity" of English literature has shifted, and "while we are busy 'consolidating', a brand new 'English' literature will be appearing in Johannesburg or Sydney

or Vancouver or Madras". Later, on 9 May 1958, the same influential paper carried a full-page article on the novels of R. K. Narayan, who happens to hail from Madras.

Indo-Anglian literature, then, is both an Indian literature and variation of English literature. It has an appeal to Indians, and it should have an appeal to Englishmen as well. Yet alas! this double base, this potential double appeal, becomes really a matter of falling between the proverbial two stools. The Indian is apt to think that Indo-Anglian literature is not—and could never be—as good as Bengali or Marathi or Tamil literature. It is all misdirected effort and a miscarriage of creative talent. One can never really hope to master a language not one's own, and an Indian writing in English is rather like one animal imitating the steps of another. Some have even gone to the extent of calling this literature a "parasitic" literature! Diffidence and lack of faith have done as much harm as complacency and lack of right training, and Indian writing in English has suffered in consequence. But the following words of Sri Aurobindo—for here only a distinguished Indian can dispel the hesitations of fellow-Indians—should serve to give the quietus to such defeatism or derogation:

It is not true in all cases that one can't write first class things in a learned language. Both in French and English people to whom the language was not native have done remarkable work, although that is rare. What about Jawaharlal's autobiography? Many English critics think it first-class in its own kind; of course he was educated in an English public school, but I suppose he was not born to that language. Some of Toru Dutt's poems, Sarojini's, Harin's have been highly placed by good English critics, and I don't think we need be more queasy than Englishmen themselves... If first-class excludes everything inferior to Shakespeare and Milton, that is another matter. I think, as time goes on, people will become more and more polyglot and these mental barriers will begin to disappear.

On the other hand, the Englishman is apt to think that Indo-Anglian literature is not—and could never be—as good as English literature (he felt in the same way once about American, Australian, Canadian or South African literature, though a more liberal attitude would appear to be prevalent now). We cannot therefore quite blame him if he now damns Indo-Anglian litera-

ture with faint praise. Isn't it really like a woman preaching or a dog walking on its hind legs—we are astonished, not that it is done well, but that it is done at all! At the end of an appreciative B.B.C. talk in 1951—the talk was afterwards reproduced in *The Listener*—Mr. Francis Watson pointedly deprecated this attitude and added: “For that sort of astonishment the bulk and variety of Indian literary achievement in the English language offers us no warrant”. While this is generous of him, it must be admitted that the average Englishman has his legitimate excuses. Indian writing in English comes to him as a curiosity, as an uncouth if exotic thing, often misty in the name of mysticism, funereal in trying to be solemn and serious, fantastically absurd in the attempt to accomplish Oriental exuberance. “Matthew Arnold in a *sari*”—so Gordon Bottomley is said to have described typical Indo-Anglian poetry; and who can stand so incongruous an apparition!

Condemned thus to negotiate an uneasy passage between these two complexes, the Indian's diffidence and the Englishman's indifference, Indo-Anglian literature has had an understandably chequered history. According to the Indian legend, Menaka the heavenly nymph appeared before Vishvamisra as he sat in self-absorbed concentration; out of their subsequent union was born Sakuntala. But neither father nor mother would have anything to do with the daughter! The predicament of Indo-Anglian literature recalls Sakuntala's fate, but has this literature Sakuntala's charm too, and will it—or can it—give us a new Bharata for Bharat? It may be that Indo-Anglian literature holds in some small measure the key to the future. Sri Aurobindo has maintained that the future poetry will acquire a *mantric* or incantatory quality—will come to us like a dance of creative life—and that such poetry will be first manifested in English, and perhaps in Indian writing in English. The future of English is indeed immense, and as the human mind of the future progressively acquires an international sweep, what is more likely than English rising to the highest heights and achieving a global comprehension, thereby ending the half-real half-mythical East-West dichotomy once and for all.

I would tell the Indian writer in English: Believe in what you do. They also serve who by deliberate choice follow the more

difficult path. It is in a way easier to make a mark in one's own language, and in the present fluid state of most of our modern Indian languages, the creative writer has great opportunities for striking out new paths and receiving quick rewards. It is even possible to be agreeably and fruitfully bilingual—as many have been, and many still are. But creative writing—whether in one's own or in an adopted language—calls for a truly dedicated spirit. Easy writing can only mean an essay in futility. Airy incompetence and defiant hurry can give us only sapless chaff and shapeless verbiage.

I would tell the Indian critic: Don't question the very base of this phenomenon of Indo-Anglian literature. Reason not the need, as Lear might have put it; judge by results. Don't let cheap nationalist sentiment colour or warp your critical appraisals. When Rammohan Roy and Ranade, Dadabhai and Phirozeshah, Surendranath and Bepin Pal, Sankaran Nair and S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Tilak and Gokhale, Malaviya and Motilal, C. R. Das and Aurobindo—when these and a hundred other nationalists and patriots of yesterday wrote or reasoned in English, they were making Indian history, and they were creating a new literature. It is pointless now to dissociate one action from the other. English has become ours, it is not less ours for being primarily the Englishman's or the American's, and Indo-Anglian literature too is our literature, the literature which, with all its limitations, still taught us to be a new nation and a new people.

To the creative writer in England I would say: Hold out your hand in friendship and fellow-feeling to the Indian writer in English. He has a mind and a soul not very different from yours, he has like you experienced agonies and joys, he has tasted boredom and banality; and if his expression seems strange or his overemphasis takes you aback, make allowances, and try to see with the eyes of understanding and affection. Writers like Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symonds, W. B. Yeats and E. M. Forster, Graham Greene and John Hampson have done this already, and there can be no limit to this extension of sympathy, to the enlargement of the area of friendship and mutual esteem. Perhaps, if not in one way in some other way, if not today at some other time, the Indo-Anglian writer would himself be able to make a token or

even a full return for what he now receives. Let him not suffer cold neglect and die for want of air.

To the critic in England I would say: English is a world language. This status carries privileges as well as responsibilities, advantages as well as dangers. To seek to preserve a norm yet permit ample variety is to walk on the razor's edge, but it can be done. Angus Wilson doesn't write like William Faulkner, and it is no wonder Mulk Raj Anand writes differently from both Wilson and Faulkner. They are all trying to be articulate each in his own fashion. Even when, for all one's trying, one is not quite articulate, the phenomenon can be a case study of the limitations of language or of the capacity of the human mind under pressure to make an impact on us in spite of imperfect articulation through language. In an American play, *The Male Animal* by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent, a Professor of English tries to illustrate points of style and effectiveness by quoting the last letter written by condemned Vanzetti. Badly written if Grammar is alone the consideration, yet how well the letter reveals the heartbeats of the writer, his mind's agitation, his soul's travail! In other words, don't too hastily condemn what is apparently strange, uncouth, extravagant or obscure. Give it first a dog's chance at least. This is all the more necessary because critical standards in India haven't yet acquired clear definition, and the right word at the right time from an English critic has helped to stabilize the literary career of more than one Indo-Anglian writer. Your fairmindedness and generosity of understanding can go a long way in the future, as in the past, in giving deserving Indo-Anglians that nod of recognition and smile of encouragement that he will always need and always prize.

Sundry Indians trying to accomplish creative self-expression through the English medium has given us Indo-Anglian literature. But for this literature to remain alive and grow with the years, a favourable climate of thought and opinion is needed in India, and this cannot just be taken for granted. At one time—over a century ago—awakened and enlightened opinion in India wanted English education, the importation of Western ideas and techniques, and the fusion of the best in our past with the best in Europe's present. By 1857, consolidation of British power under the East India Company had taken place, and after the brief night-

mare of the Mutiny, the Crown took over responsibility from the Company. From 1857 to 1900 English education took rapid strides, and the climate was favourable for a new flowering of the creative Indian genius. The next 20 years saw a further spread of English education, but there were heard the notes of dissent and discontent also. Then came Mahatma Gandhi, and from 1920 to 1947 he led a unique revolution against the British bureaucracy in India, with sudden storms and uneasy lulls alternating, till the British divided the country and withdrew as a political force on 15 August 1947. Since then we are going through the ardours and trials of reconstruction, sometimes elated by hopeful visions, sometimes depressed by gloomy forebodings.

English has remained in the saddle all along, Indian writing in English has achieved a new range and power, literacy in English has been steadily growing, there are more schools, colleges, and universities, there are more English newspapers and readers of such papers, than ever before. On the other hand, English in India has of late been seized by the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty. Since 1920 at any rate, English education and the use of English by Indians have come in for some considerable criticism, and Hindi has been set up as a possible substitute for English. The Constitution of India gave English a lease of another 15 years' life, and the sands of time—as measured by that hour-glass—are fast running out.² English is expanding at the base as it were absent-mindedly, but is slowly losing its main vitality, while Hindi is trying to look important and is preparing to take the place of English. More recently certain South Indian leaders like Rajaji (C. Rajagopalachari) have come out boldly with the suggestion that English should continue as India's official language for all-India and international purposes, as also as the medium of instruction in the university, and as the medium of the higher law courts and of the learned journals. In the course of a veritable Midlothian campaign Rajaji has driven his points home with deadly accuracy drawing the bow of reason and releasing the shafts of telling parables, and it may now be said that Hindi is

² The threatened expulsion of English has not taken place, for at the end of the stipulated 15 years, English has been given by parliamentary enactment the status of an 'associate language' with Hindi for an indefinite period.

forced into the defensive. Let me read a passage or two from Rajaji's recent pronouncements on this question:

I am convinced that the attempt to replace English by Hindi at the Union level, be it now or on a future date, will once again bring into being a disintegrated India. Whatever unification has been brought about as a result of history will be disrupted.... With English will go all the all-India feeling we have now got. Nuts, walls, and countries easily crack where there is a natural or innate breaking demarkation. I utter this grave warning. It is the warning of one who loves India and loves unity....

He has warned us that the bird in hand, English, is better than the synthetic bird, Hindi, proposed to be manufactured in the future. And after chasing away what he has called the many *Mayas* or illusions with regard to the official language, he ends with this magnificent peroration:

Let English continue.

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

So the Psalmist sang: The builders had rejected it as being of curious shape, not rectangled and none of its sides square or oblong. But it became the keystone of the arch and its strange shape was its merit. Not some one of our own languages, but this strange one will keep the arch firm and all the languages together. It is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes!

During the decades of Gandhian leadership, certain panaceas were offered as the solvent of one or another of our national evils. Khadi (or hand-woven hand-spun cloth) was thus set against mill-made cloth, and the substitution was expected to alleviate some of the economic evils of the country. Likewise the adoption of Hindi or Hindustani as a national language was expected to raise our self-respect and promote a feeling of unity in the country. But after almost 40 years of the seeming reign of Gandhian thought, Khadi has no more displaced mill-cloth than Hindi has displaced English. For whatever reasons, there are said to be stresses and strains in the textile industry in India; and there are also similar difficulties with regard to English studies in the country. But there is a very real danger in our attempts to harden into creeds the experimental programmes of pre-independence days. We are

engaged in enacting, not an Utopian dream, but the far more exacting drama of history. Bookish theorists who point out that talking or writing in English is difficult or artificial or derogatory to our self-respect should ponder a little and realize that the whole adventure of civilization is itself a difficult and artificial drama. Dress, cooked food, machinery, using the telephone, pedalling the bicycle, blood-transfusion, injection of medicines into the human system, all are difficult and artificial, and in a way sin against Nature and offer an affront to human dignity and self-respect. But there are ample compensations too, and that is why we are reconciled to these many concomitants of a developing civilization, increasingly controlled by science and technology, increasingly centralized and of late 'globalized', if such a word may be coined for the purpose. Willy nilly the rigours and pressures of the thermo-nuclear age are upon us—we can no more hold them in permanent check than was Canute able to hold back the waves! An accident of history brought us into contact with the English language: during the 150 years of our association with it, we have marched to nationhood and independence, and the English language too has during this period waxed in importance, outdistanced its rivals—French, German and Spanish—and acquired a pre-eminent status in the counsels of the world. Rajaji has boldly asserted that English is the gift of Saraswati to us—Saraswati is the Hindu Goddess of Learning and the Arts—and we shall reject this light from the West only at peril to our sanity and security. Nor is it at all likely that we will shut this Western window in the vague hope that some other window may be fitted into the wall at some future time to admit light and fresh air into the room!

Eleven years after independence, and notwithstanding all the special facilities afforded by Party and Government for its expansion, Hindi has made no spectacular advance, and the vogue for English has suffered no serious set-back. If statistics are not to be dismissed as a form of lies, recent statistics are very revealing.⁸ From the Annual Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India for the year 1957 we learn that 50 English newspapers in

⁸ More recent statistics do not seem to invalidate the conclusions drawn here. English newspapers and magazines maintain their comfortable lead, and books published in English in India are about as many as in all the other languages put together.

India had between them a circulation of 1,005,000, while 57 Hindi newspapers had an aggregate circulation of only 394,000; and English newspapers as a rule are not only better edited but are also read all over the country, whereas the Hindi reading public is confined to parts of North India alone. Again, it is an interesting fact that there are seven times as many quarterly journals in English (mostly of a learned character) as in Hindi—and as many in English as in almost all the other languages put together. We learn further that during 1957 as many as 193 new English journals were started as against only 108 Hindi journals, and 37 Hindi journals ceased publication as against only 25 English journals. Moreover, a study team visited most of the Indian Universities some months ago with a view to exploring the possibilities of university publishing in India. The team found that only 11 universities have sizeable publishing programmes, and between them have brought out 1845 learned books; out of these, as many as 778 are in English, 333 are in Sanskrit, 130 in Tamil, 120 in Bengali, 195 in Kannada, 105 in Malayalam, 38 in Telugu and only 26 in Hindi. Even these 26 books have come, not from the universities in the Hindi region, but from Calcutta (10), Osmania (5), Visvabharati (5), and Madras (2), only Patna providing the remaining (4). Osmania had at one time an ambitious programme of Urdu publications, but all that has proved a costly fiasco, and the university has now reverted to the English medium. The position therefore is that people now continue to talk and write in English, the language of the higher administration and the law courts remains English, the medium of teaching and examinations in most colleges and universities is English, the proceedings of the numerous all-India conferences and congresses are conducted in English, and the many examinations and interviews for the Indian Administrative and other all-India services and even most of the provincial services are also conducted in English. As is to be only expected and indeed welcomed, the regional languages are steadily forging forward, and Hindi too is worthily participating in this movement of expansion and modernization. But for all-India administration, inter-state communication, pursuit of knowledge at the higher levels, and for maintaining and promoting international contacts, English is proving an indispensable tool, a cementing force, a key, and a channel all at once. Neither

the conscientious Englishman nor the patriotic Indian need *now* be apologetic about the introduction and continuation of English education in India. Yeats once remarked that English education had made "a stately people clownish, putting indignity into their very souls". He was wrong, though wrong in a characteristically Irish way. It was another Irishman who wrote as follows to me in 1955 after reading an article by me on our languages problem:

There seems to be a growing universal tendency to confuse linguistics and politics, and as you know, my own country has paid dearly because of it. Emotional politicians have not only killed any possibility of the Irish language being revived in Ireland but have spent millions of pounds in doing so.

Hindi will grow in good time, and perhaps one day by virtue of its richness and strength become the *de facto lingua franca* of India. But merely forcing the pace somehow and inflating the body with tens of thousands of hastily coined, cumbrous, unpronounceable new technical terms and expressions will kill it rather than give it a national vogue. Meantime, thanks to English, the national administration is a going concern, there is one clearly understood body of laws for the whole country, and the intellectual world of India is recognizably *one* world. But the danger still is that we may surrender to sentiment and fight in the name of nationalism the very forces that are helping to beat us into the shape of a nation and purblindly canter towards the abyss of isolation and obscurantism. As Dr. Gunnar Myrdal the Swedish economist has pointed out, culturally an underdeveloped country "has reasons for learning from all the world. It is a policy of defeatism, which a poor country least of all can afford, to build up barriers against the richer world's civilization and values". We have to follow a policy that is no doubt reasonably nationalist, but one that is likely to bring us "nearer, and not farther away from, the stage where an integrated world policy based on international solidarity could be effectively attempted". Although the words are taken out of the context, their pertinence is not affected in the least. In the developing world drama, the future is with English, not Hindi; and there is an intelligentsia scattered all over India that already knows English. It is wiser on the whole to foster this bird in hand than nose about the bush for another. We have to learn to be

modern, we have to think of the future as well as the present, and we have to think of the mass of the people who have to be enabled to rise to a level of cultural and economic self-sufficiency. The masses should be approached through the regional languages which need to lean on English as well as Sanskrit to achieve positions of strength and maturity in the competitive modern world.

There is another point too to be remembered. English is the veritable Suez Canal for intellectual intercourse between the West and the East—between England and India especially; and the traffic is by no means altogether one-sided. Not only Indian thought from Vedic to modern times has found its way to the West, but eminent Indian thinkers of yesterday and today—from Rammohan Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen to Vivekananda, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, and Radhakrishnan—have made themselves heard in the West, a cultural offensive (if so it may be called) rendered easier by their mastery of the English language. In one of her letters to me, the late Dorothy Richardson the novelist remarked after reading about Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*:

So many people know modern Indian thought through the writings of Tagore. To them, as to myself after a lifetime's indignation, it will be a comfort to realize that at least, in making English compulsory, we did, albeit in our own interest, make a gift to India and thus, at last to the whole world.

We cannot list Rammohan Roy and Ranade, Vivekananda and Aurobindo, Tilak and Gokhale, Tagore and Gandhi in the calendar of our prophets and poets, and yet cultivate a blind antipathy towards the language they used as the forceful means of communicating their meaning and message to India and the world. These stalwarts were among the makers of modern India, and what they said and wrote must therefore be cherished as our national literature. English, then, is one of our national languages, and Indo-Anglian literature too is one of our national literatures.

We have thus reached the point where we are able to see Indian writing in English as a distinctive literature—a tree that has sprung up on hospitable soil from a seed that a random breeze had brought from afar. A critical study of this literature, however, needs much more than the mere acknowledgement of its

existence for yielding satisfactory results. Literature and authorship in India has on the whole been a precarious affair, and this applies with particular force to Indo-Anglian literature. Standards of book production are low, publishers tend to concentrate on school texts or examination guides or sex-sustained books, reviewing is casual or partisan, and the book buying habit is practically non-existent. The position is improving—especially in the bigger cities—but many a writer is still obliged to turn his own manager of publications! The author presents numerous copies to his friends, well-wishers and ‘patrons’, and alas! books thus given away are seldom read, though the wretched author hopes against hope that they will be. A single edition of about 500 copies is all that a vast majority of books (excluding school and college texts or ‘guides’) can ever hope for, and when a book goes out of print, it goes out for ever. It has reached the point of no return. The booksellers too concentrate on books with an immediate popular or wide academic appeal, and even when they dare to be adventurous, all they can handle are the Penguins, Pans, Pelicans, the American paperbacks and their imitations in India—no small tribe! New creative literature must shift for itself somehow.

The average Indo-Anglian writer bears all these badges of limitation like other Indian writers, and manages to measure out his literary life with these coffee-spoons of neglect or indifference. A distinguished Indo-Anglian journalist—perhaps the most brilliant in the field today—once remarked: “The Indo-Anglian leads a precarious life in magazines and dies in a book”. Only too true! When it is remembered further that most of these magazines are now defunct and the books have been swallowed up by oblivion, the difficulties that a historian of Indo-Anglian literature has to face to get at his material can easily be appreciated. And when one does obtain at last the book one has been seeking long, what are one’s immediate reactions? In J. C. Rollo’s words,

Many misprints ... the grimmest boards for cover. Non-opaque paper, so that every page is darkened by the print on the other side. Pages economically small-margined and un-headed, so that one looks instinctively for the numbered lines of a school-text.

One’s reaction is not unlike Edmund Gosse’s when he first came

across a bleak copy of Toru Dutt's *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Yet we know that Edmund Gosse, on opening a page at random, lighted upon a piece of exquisite translation by Aru Dutt that filled him at once with rapture. That was, no doubt, a unique event in the annals of Indo-Anglian literature, but we have no cause to assume that the age of surprises has gone for ever. Gems do still occasionally lie entangled in bush and briar, and the literary historian and critic has to seek with the eyes of faith and a heart sustained by adamant hope. The reward will come, today or tomorrow, or some other day. Meantime one has to persevere.

My interest in the subject may be said to date back to 1928 when I was a young teacher in Ceylon, and coming upon a copy of the late K. S. Venkataramani's *The Next Rung*, I reviewed it in the *Times of Ceylon*. This led to some correspondence between us, which later developed into friendship. As a reviewer during the next 10 years, I had occasion to notice from time to time Indo-Anglian poetry and fiction, and I made friends with many Indo-Anglians, some of whom have later risen to high positions. My 'bird's-eye-view' of this literature in *The Indian P.E.N.* of November 1938 led to the assignment that I should write a small book on the subject, and this was duly published in 1943 after various wartime delays. It was while writing this book that I compared my predicament to that described by T. S. Eliot—

I think we are in rat's alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

Many authors were good enough to send complimentary copies or lend their own copies to me, and I was also able to buy a few books helped by a token grant by the Bombay University. In 1945, I accordingly published a rather more sumptuous volume entitled, *The Indian Contribution to English Literature*. I have since been returning to this subject off and on in response to requests from the organizers of literary conferences or the editors of journals or symposia. Another ardent worker in the field was my late friend Professor V. N. Bhushan, a poet in his own right, and the editor of the two anthologies, *The Peacock Lute* and *The Moving Finger*. Mr. John Gawsworth, while in India and Burma during the war, accidentally came upon my little P.E.N. book, met

Sarojini Naidu, did some rapid exploration of Indo-Anglian poetry, and made it the subject of a warmly appreciative lecture before the Bengal Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and suggested the creation of a Toru Dutt Chair in Indo-Anglian Literature in the Calcutta University. In spite of all this, the interest in Indo-Anglian literature is pitifully fitful and the impression still is that the Indo-Anglians are India's literary cranks if not worse, that their work lacks vitality as well as intrinsic worth, and that it is best to leave them alone. Any suggestion that the work of an Indo-Anglian writer may be prescribed for class study in school or college is generally met with opposition. Of late, however, certain writers have been regularly getting into the anthologies—Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Radhakrishnan, and a few others. Yet eighty years ago the Rev. Mr. Macdonald had the courage to include one of Toru Dutt's poems—'My Vocation'—in a *Course of English Poetry* meant for the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University. The hard main block of English studies in our universities should without question be English literature from Chaucer to the present day, but surely out of 8 or 10 papers at the M.A., one at least could be set apart for Indo-Anglian literature, even as similar provision is made in Australian Universities for Australian literature and in American Universities for American literature. But some of us in India would rather batter our heads against *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon and Peterborough Chronicles than read critically the Indian masters of English prose and verse.⁴

There is also another side to the shield. Admitted or not, the fact remains that some of the leading practitioners of Indian writing in English are today occupying high positions in our public life. Our late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and our former President, Radhakrishnan, are both writers of great distinction, and their writing has been exclusively in English. We have bilingualists like India's elder statesman, C. Rajagopalachari, who is as much at home in English as in Tamil. Although the Indian Constitution does not list English as one of the languages of the Union, our National Academy of Letters (the Sahitya Akademi, as it is called)

⁴ During the last 10 years, however, the position has changed. The subject now figures in the postgraduate courses of some universities, and it is also being cultivated by numerous research scholars.

has an Advisory Board for English of which I am now the Convener; and the Akademi's official journal, *Indian Literature*, is also in English. Our journals and newspapers publish fiction and poetry in English, and the editor of the leading Indian Weekly magazine recently wrote to me that he receives on an average 30 English poems a day, or over 10,000 per year. There is an Indian Association for English Studies that holds Conferences annually—and the latest was held last month at Madras, and was attended by Professor Jeffares and myself. The English Faculties in the Indian Universities continue to draw, year after year, quite a few apt enthusiastic pupils, and while it is true that standards seem to be falling near the base, my own experience as an examiner is that at the top the good candidates are as good as ever and very good indeed. The cry has been heard of late—and some well-meaning Englishmen too have given the movement their support—that it is as a tool alone English should be given to the mass of our pupils in the university, and not as a cultural and spiritual heritage. This may be all right for countries that start learning English now for the first time, but other ideas had ruled in India, and it is neither wholly possible nor altogether wise to reverse the current today.

It was in this context of general indifference to Indian writing in English on the one hand and the wide actual (almost absent-minded) currency of English in India on the other—both strangely emphasised by the raging controversy about the official language ("a cold war", the Prime Minister has called it) that has been going on during the last year or two,—it was in this context that I received the invitation from your University to lecture on Indo-Anglian literature. It was too good to be true, and it *was* true. It was certainly appropriate that a British University should first give official recognition to Indo-Anglian literature, this tributary and this off-shoot of English literature. I was not, of course, equally happy about the choice of myself for the task of interpreting Indo-Anglian literature to students of a British University. While I have written about the Indo-Anglians spasmodically, I have never before lectured about them in college or university—my main preoccupations being Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and the moderns. I have hardly been able to keep in touch with the latest publications, a disability accentuated by the fact that my own University is located, not in one of the principal cities

of India, but in an out-of-the-way place—an enchanting spot, no doubt, the sea on two sides and hills on the other two, but rather out of bounds in certain important respects. Even so I decided I would take courage in both hands and accept the invitation that you had so warmly extended to me, and so you find me here today speaking in a language not mine, on a subject that is partly mine, but partly also yours: whether more mine than yours or more yours than mine, we need not linger to dispute. It is ours, verily ours, and so let us explore it together.

Here, then, is a body of writing, the creation of the Indian race in the Indian climate responding fruitfully to the Western impact during the 19th and 20th centuries,—the creation too of certain gifted individuals from Rammohan Roy to Dom Moraes who have been able to triumph over many limitations and achieve impressive results in a foreign medium. Here are we, you and I, trying to weigh this literature, measure its significances, and strike out a balance sheet. What critical criteria shall we apply? Shall we judge it as English literature because it comes to us with an English skin (though a little tanned, shall we say, by the tropical Sun), or shall we judge it as Indian literature because it is, after all, the creation of Indians? There is a continuous Western critical tradition from Aristotle to T. S. Eliot, and more particularly an English critical tradition from Sidney and Ben Jonson and Dryden to the mentors of our own day, Eliot, Richards and Leavis. Likewise, there is an Indian critical tradition with the emphasis on *rasa* and *dhwani*, the *bhavas* and the *alankaras*, and in the line of law-givers like Bharata, Bhatta Nayaka, Mammata, Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta have come modern thinkers like Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. But even as Indian English hasn't yet acquired an arresting distinctiveness like the American English of, say, William Faulkner, Indian criticism too has yet to find its feet and stand its ground boldly. There are peculiarities of Indian life and experience and speech that don't easily admit of translation into English terms. If the translation is not attempted, one fails in one's duty as an Indian; if the attempt doesn't succeed, if the result is an exotic, an oddity, an excrescence or an absurdity, one fails as a writer in English. What is written has to be recognizably Indian to the Indian reader and recognizably English to the English reader. Indian English is partly conditioned by Indian

geography and the grammar and speech habits in different linguistic areas, but it cannot go very far from the imperatives of 'standard English' as it prevails in England. Thus one easily falls between two stools—or, wonder of wonders, one achieves the double triumph of honest translation and glorious transformation. Between the English way and the Indian way, a compromise, I suppose, is called for—not a compromise really, but a new mutation. The Indian critic should make allowances, be satisfied with what appears to be rather less than the whole arc of the Indian way of artistic expression; and the English critic too should make allowances and be prepared for surprises, elaborations, and seemingly strange similitudes. An experimental new literature would thus need an experimental critical approach for its proper evaluation. A doctrinaire approach is to be avoided at all costs. Much of Indian writing in English has had no more than a contemporaneous significance; it meant a great deal to those for whom it was written, though others might not have thought much about it. Some of this writing, again, inspires in us strong emotion in terms of the personality of the writers concerned. And, fortunately, some Indian writing in English can be described as literature by any standards whatsoever. The critic has to sift if he can the permanent from the ephemeral, the universal from the personal, give credit where it is due, account for reputations that have since faded away, and explain why from all this everlasting deluge of useless books—in Schopenhauer's pitiless phrase—some few books stand out and defy time and silence criticism. It calls for more than scholarship and familiarity with critical categories, it calls for perception of a high order, a freedom from prejudice, a capacity for looking beneath the appearance, and above all a flicker of the wisdom and insight that is more than industry and discipline and knowledge,—it calls for the flame of understanding that is itself a renewal of life. Only Christ is the best critic and only he is truly infallible, said Hopkins writing to his friend Dixon. But since we cannot be Christs, let us at least beware of the money-changers, the Pharisees and the Philistines. We can at least approach this literature with something of an open mind, not too impatient to pause, nor too ready to condemn. May be we shall see some good in it, after all.

II

The Beginnings: Rammohan Roy

I tried to show last time that, as a distinctive body of writing, Indo-Anglian literature undoubtedly exists, and it is likely to grow in volume and vitality. At any rate, it seemed desirable to me—as it has seemed to others—that the climate of thought and education in India should be favourable enough to permit this literature to grow more and more with the years for the good of India and the world. We shall now take a backward glance at the beginnings of this literature, in other words probe into its aetiology. The beginnings of the older literatures are generally shrouded in the mists of antiquity, and we have for the most part to be content with guesses and hypotheses. Indo-Anglian literature is of more recent origin, and hence its beginnings could be traced with reasonable certitude. Such an inquiry, besides, must prove rewarding for more than one reason.

The French literary historian, M. Taine, said that literature is the creation of three factors: the race, the milieu, the moment. This need not be accepted as a total truth, for the individual too has his own part to play in literary creation. But the sociological theory has its uses. As regards Indo-Anglian literature, the 'race' is the mixed Indian race, a resultant of invasions, conquests, and occupations extending over a period of four or five thousand years; the 'milieu', the variegated Indian subcontinent, comprising extremes of every kind, heir to a geography and cultural heritage all its own; and the 'moment', the meeting of the West and India.

We often talk of the Western 'impact' on India, and picture the West and India clashing, destroying, creating. But the West was no single entity, and really meant sundry Portuguese, Dutch, British and French—with a few Danes, Germans, and Italians thrown in—who came in different waves, as merchants, as missionaries, as soldiers, as adventurers or administrators, and often worked at cross purposes. The merchants came to make quick

money, the missionaries came to save pagan souls, and the soldier-administrator came to achieve the conquest of the country. But the West in India was a self-divided world,—the Portuguese gave no quarter to the Dutch, nor the French to the British, and the Catholic looked askance at the Protestant and his sub-varieties. India too was monstrously self-divided: after Aurangzeb's death, the Mughal Empire began to crack visibly, and the process went on unchecked. The Mughals and the Marathas, the Nawabs and the Rajas, the petty chieftains of the North and the South, warred suicidally among themselves, and sometimes fought the foreigner, sometimes sought his help. Petty armies marched up and down, cities and forts quickly changed hands. loyalties were light as the wind, and famines stalked abroad. In the result, India during the 17th and more especially the 18th century presented the spectacle of decay and misery unimaginable. Shah Jehan's imperial Delhi was now a city of terror and corruption, and India as a whole recalled, in Mr. O'Malley's words, the days before the Flood as they struck Adam in his vision—

Violence

Proceeded, and oppression, and sword-law,
Through all the plain, and refuge none was found.

Vitality and the zest for life were at vanishing point, spirituality glowed but in fitful embers, and all intellectual activity was nearly at a standstill. By the end of the 18th century, India was to all appearance a Waste Land.

But, then, India was a vast, almost an endless country, and the means of transport were slow. Even in the days of the worst corruption there were not wanting pockets of order or health, and at no time was the confusion quite complete, and life still gallantly resisted the attack of disease and death. The villages have had their own age-long intricate organization, and this persisted. The caste system, iniquitous in many ways, nevertheless held society together, at least in the villages. Trade and industry flourished after a fashion, and since the social system had not cracked, culture too eked out a life of a sort. Decadence had no doubt set in, but decadence was not death. And there was even a burst of new flowering in some places, for example music in South India associated with the great names of Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri

and Muthuswami Dhikshitar. There were Urdu poets at Lucknow and Delhi, there were Sanskrit scholars at Banaras and Nadia, and there were Tamil poets and Sanskrit scholars at Madura. "In this and other ways", Mr. O'Malley observes, "an ethos was maintained which was free from the subversive forces of new ideas and alien systems, and continuity with the past was maintained".

A few cardinal dates may here prove helpful in our study of this age of transition from the old to the new India. The Battle of Plassey was fought in 1757—over 200 years ago. Clive, however, declined the responsibility of Diwani or revenue administration, and it was only in 1772 that the East India Company took it over, and still later, in 1790, the responsibility for the administration of criminal justice. The East India Company had been formed as early as 1599 at a meeting attended by leading London merchants, but more than 150 years were to pass before Plassey gave the company the key to the domination of Bengal, and India generally. Even so, British-born subjects were not allowed freely to come to India or settle down there. From prohibition in 1766, the next step was licensing, which came into operation in 1784, but eleven years later, even those settled already in India were asked to furnish securities ranging from £200-500. The Company distrusted the private profiteer as much as the busybody missionary, but profiteer and missionary alike had means of evading the Company's attentions. In short, the Company was interested in political domination only to the extent such domination increased its own dividends. The Company was directly interested neither in Empire nor in the Kingdom of Christ, and certainly not in the suppression or advancement of the indigenous culture. Individual servants of the Company, however, made an exception to the rule. Warren Hastings, who established the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781, Sir William Jones, who organized the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, and Sir Thomas Munro at Madras were rather impressed by the culture of the Hindus, and Munro Sahib indeed declared in the course of the evidence he gave before Parliament in 1873:

If civilization were ever to become an article of trade between the two countries, England would greatly benefit by the import cargo.

And men like Munro and Jones came to be called 'Brahmanised

Britons', because they both admired Indian culture and deprecated the idea of introducing Western civilization or Christianity into India.

These qualifications are necessary to dispel the notion—still widely held in some quarters—that the Western impact was anything so sudden or concerted or premeditated as, say, the march of the German armies into France in 1914. The East India Company was a trading corporation, and its servants in India were mercenaries and adventurers, often unscrupulous men, but not seldom capable men, good soldiers, good administrators, good men. The missionaries too were of all kinds, good, bad, and indifferent. But why blame the others? India was betrayed by what was false or weak within her. India had become diseased and self-divided. The division and disease had started even before the West turned to the East; perhaps even before Islam came to India in wave after wave of invasion. The real roots of ancient India's greatness were (in Sri Aurobindo's words) "an ingrained and dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gust of life and, mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence combined of the rational, ethical, and aesthetic mind each at a high intensity of action"—in other words, the spirit, the intellect, and the life-impulse, all functioning at the highest pitch and yet working in the closest collaboration. Then came the ages of complacency and superficial advance and inner stagnation and decay. The spirit's light receded, the intellect dissipated itself in grandiose nothings, and the will to live suffered a strange attenuation. The ascetic, the illusionist, the nihilist, the hedonist,—all contributed to the havoc. And the series of disasters on the political and economic fronts only hastened the process and completed the national catastrophe. By the beginning of the 19th century, Britain—or the East India Company—was more or less master of the situation in India. But what a situation!

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.

At last, in 1813, the commercial monopoly of the Company was ended, and the British in India assumed, besides police functions.

educative and civilizing functions as well. Missionaries were permitted to enter the country freely, and a token grant of Rs. 1 lakh per year was made for education; as yet, however, the idea was that only Oriental learning was to be promoted. On the other hand, very different forces were at work whose influence was slowly coming to be felt. The missionaries had already helped to establish printing presses in different parts of the country, and books in the vernacular as also in English were coming out since the beginning of the 18th century, at first in hardly more than a trickle, but presently in impressive volume. Dictionaries, grammars, and translations were among the first fruits of such missionary enterprise, and formal prose in the vernaculars was attempted. The printing press inevitably led to the newspapers, and *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* (India's first newspaper) came out in 1780, and others followed in due course. Last came the private schools imparting English education—such schools had been started as early as 1717 at Cuddalore near Madras, 1718 at Bombay (by Richard Cobbe, a Chaplain), and 1720 at Calcutta, endowed by the Thomlinsons,—culminating in the establishment, in 1817, of the Hindu College at Calcutta, the creation of Raja Rammohan Roy and his friends, David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde East. It started with 100 students, and in less than forty years became the Presidency College in 1855, the premier educational institution of Bengal. Meantime the Serampore College was founded in 1818 by Carey, Ward and Marshman, the missionaries. Without waiting for Government to move in the matter, far-sighted men in Bombay and Madras too began to think in terms of Western education. And in Madras a colloquial knowledge of English was (as noted by C. E. Trevelyan) “a much more common acquirement . . . than in Bengal”. The future was clearly not with a pure Oriental education,—the Madrassa at Calcutta, for example, could accumulate only 12 books in the course of 42 years, and so came in for much ridicule. The Oriental College at Banaras had fared no better. On the contrary, the colleges imparting Western education were obviously flourishing, and the demand was for more and more. Rammohan Roy, in his plea for English instead of Oriental education, asked Lord Amherst in 1823 to compare the state of science and literature in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon with the progress made since, and added:

If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner, the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislators. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, with other useful sciences, which may be accomplished with the sums proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe and providing a College furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.

Nay more: Rammohan Roy not only wanted English and more English in India, he also wanted more Englishmen in India. He balanced the advantages and disadvantages, enumerated 9 of the former and 5 of the latter, and concluded by saying:

... the settlement in India by Europeans should at least be undertaken experimentally, so that its effects may be ascertained by actual observation on a moderate scale.... On mature consideration, therefore, I think I may safely recommend that educated persons of character and capital should now be permitted and encouraged to settle in India, without any restriction of locality or any liability to banishment, at the discretion of the Government...

Although the Orientalists and the Anglicists continued to wrangle, it was clear the former were steadily losing ground; and Macaulay's celebrated Minute clinched the issue at last. He declared that it was both necessary and possible "to make natives of this country good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed". The die was cast, and on 7 March 1835, Lord William Bentinck resolved that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone".¹

¹ Prof. M. M. Bhattacharje has shown (*Bengal: Past and Present*, No. 134, 1953) that, not the British rulers, but "the earnest desire and repeated representations of Indians" were responsible for the introduction of English and Western Culture into India.

From 1835 was the Anglicizing period—but this attempt at forcible de-Orientalization and violent unnatural Anglicization brought many evils in its wake. That the culprits were the fanatic Indians as much as the British bureaucrats didn't make the operation itself less obnoxious. English education was certainly desirable, it brought new life, opened new vistas of knowledge; but at the base children should learn only through their own mother tongues. "On English education *alone*"—this exclusiveness had proved disastrous. It became a matter of false pride for some Indians—then and later, and alas! even now—to educate their children in total ignorance of their own mother tongues. The remedy to the old disease of obscurantism was not this poison of uprootedness, this complete divorce from one's own ancestral moorings. Trying to swallow the West wholesale, some of these newly educated men became comic imitations, without any enduring contact with the West or the East. Sir Charles Wood's Despatch of 1854 took note of these alarming symptoms, and made a praiseworthy attempt to redress the balance. The mother tongue would be the base, but English would reign at the higher levels—such was the happy and healthy compromise, and in essentials this is the position even today. It should also be added that, even before the Wood Despatch, vernacular education had taken considerable strides in Madras and Bombay, only Bengal being almost wholly under the fascination for English, and English alone.

During the 20 years between 1835 and 1855—the period of the Macaulay and the Wood dispensations—the number of those educated in English had been rapidly increasing, and the number of 'private' Englishmen in India too had increased fourfold. It is said that even in 1834-5, 32,000 English books sold in India, as against 13,000 in Hindi, Hindustani and Bengali, and 1,500 in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. The vogue for English books increased, and the demand came even more from the Indian than from the Englishman in India. Western ways—in manners and customs, in dress, in eating, in salutation—became current in the bigger towns and cities, and it is said that Lucknow in 1824 had the look rather of a European city like Dresden. In 1853 the first Railway was opened in India, in 1854 the first telegraph line and a modern postal system were

inaugurated. Distance was being abridged, a common medium of communication was being established though only at the higher levels, modern European scientific techniques (including medicine and surgery) were being introduced, and India was being led out—so it was thought—from secure and static mediaevalism to restless, dynamic modernism.

All the same, the trite metaphor of the West impinging on India is apt to be misleading. English education was a new force—part elixir, part poison—injecting into Indian life, but the immediate effects were seen only on the surface. The deeper consequences were not—could not be—at once felt. The young men who had received the new education often went the whole hog—dressed, thought, ate, and drank like the Englishmen; but the parents, the wives, the relations in the villages, moved still in the grooves of tradition. “Our educated young men . . . belong to the nineteenth century”, said Protap Chandra Mazoomdar, “but their homes belong to the first century”. In a sense it was good; there was a way of retreat in an emergency. But it made the building up of harmonious homes very difficult.

The introduction—the infiltration—of Western culture, the study of English literature, the adoption of Western scientific techniques, although they gave a jolt to India’s traditional life, although they generated a good many wrong movements, nevertheless served us nobly by shocking us into a new awareness, a sense of urgency, a flair for practicality, and an alertness in thought and action. The long dormant intellectual and critical impulse was quickened into sudden life, a new efflorescence was visible everywhere, and the reawakening Indian spirit went forth to meet the violent challenge of the values of modern science and the civilization of the West. “Under English rule in India”, writes Mr. Arthur Mayhew, “the impact of two civilizations may have produced unrest. But it has also sustained and stimulated life”. It is an extraordinary story of endurance, assimilation and integral transformation.

Such was the ‘moment’, the phoenix-hour that bred Indo-Anglian literature, sometimes with solemn self-consciousness, but sometimes as naturally—unself-consciously—as leaves grow upon a tree. Indians learnt at first to read and speak and comprehend English, and they soon started writing also. Once

this started, Indian writing in English had to range from the most utilitarian prose to the most ambitious verse—epics, for example! On the other hand, Indian writing in English was but one manifestation of the new creative urge in India—what is often referred to as the literary renaissance in India. The exhausted, almost sapless, native soil received the new rich fertiliser from the West, and out of this fruitful union—as it happened in Elizabethan England—a new literature was born. Bengali led the way, but the others were not slow to follow. And Indo-Anglian literature had the same origin as the other modern Indian literatures, though here the foreign element may seem to be more prominent and more obvious. The study of English literature stimulated literary creation in Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Gujarati, and the other languages, and some of the greatest writers of the last 100 years have been men and women educated in English, even if they didn't seek creative expression through English; and, of course, some have been unrepentant bilingualists, writing in two languages, English and their mother tongue, with equal facility, and if necessary translating their English into their mother tongue or their Bengali or Marathi or Tamil into English. The filiations between the modern Indian literatures (including Indo-Anglian literature) and English literature have been close, and the links have been renewed from time to time, and the student of literary history and of comparative literature can find much to interest him in this phenomenon.

The renaissance in modern Indian literature begins with Raja Rammohan Roy to whom pointed reference has been made already. Born in a village (Radhanagore) in Bengal on 22 May 1772, he died at Bristol on 27 September 1833: a singular concatenation, a preordained sequence of events in the life of a man who was destined to act as a bridge between India and England. Rammohan Roy mastered while still young many languages, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani besides Bengali. After journeying within and outside India and some business ventures at Calcutta, he served in the districts under two British officials—Woodforde and Digby—and the association was more than merely official. It was when working with Digby that Rammohan completed his mastery of the English

language which he had started learning much earlier. Leaving Company service at last, Rammohan returned to Calcutta in 1814, started the Atmiya Sabha, and so launched himself on the consciousness of Calcutta society. The next few years were a period of hectic activity, tireless endeavour, and often acrimonious controversy with Christians and Hindus alike. The plight of the widows, the darkness of superstition, the miasma of ignorance, the general backwardness of the country, all stirred him to action. While being attracted by Christianity, Rammohan realized with sorrow that the bigoted Christian was as conceited as the bigoted Hindu, and was hence equally impervious to rational argument. With the starting in 1821 of *Sambad Kaumudi*, a weekly paper, Rammohan was able to make a bolder and more sustained onslaught on the forces of prejudice and reaction. By 1823 he had fully matured, sharpened his dialectical instruments, tested his friends, and re-thought his ends and means. If he had experienced disillusion, it had only added, in the words of his biographer Iqbal Singh, "an adult dimension of chastened judgement to his experience and a surer quality of wisdom to his intelligence".

During the remaining 10 years of his life, 1823-1833, he craned, in Brajendranath Seal's words, "the work of half a dozen giants". He was, in the first place, an intensely religious man, a Hindu and a Brahmin, who felt that quintessential Hinduism was of a piece with quintessential Christianity and Islam. He looked under the bewildering edifices of dogma, ritual, philosophical dialectics, and sought the foundations of the great faiths, which seemed to him identical, and on these he wished to raise his Brahmo Samaj, rather as Akbar had done in his day in his own way.² Rammohan thus came, not to destroy, but to fulfil; not to divide, but to unite. The Brahmo Samaj wasn't meant to be something altogether new; as Ranade pointed out in a speech made in 1896, Rammohan Roy "aspired only to establish Harmony between men's accepted faith and their practical observances by a strict monolatrous worship of the

² "Rammohan's idea was", said his colleague Satish Chandra Chakraborti in 1833, "that his Samaj was to be, not a temple of a new sect, but the unifier of all India through the common worship of one God by the members of all denominations".

One Supreme Soul, a worship of the heart and not of the hands, a sacrifice of self and not of the possessions of the self". In the second place, he was a great humanitarian and social reformer. Humanity was no mass that he viewed in the abstract, but a collection of individuals, each of whom mattered as a unique piece of trembling reality. Hence the battle he waged against the monstrous custom of *sati*, and when it was abolished by Lord William Bentinck, he was profoundly moved and he raised his voice to offer thanks to Heaven,

Whose protecting arm has rescued our weaker sex from cruel murder under the cloak of religion, and our character as a people from the contempt and pity with which it has been regarded, on account of this custom, by all civilized nations on the surface of the globe.

He also drafted the address presented to Lord William Bentinck on 16 January 1830.

Rammohan Roy's interests and inquiries ranged from the rights of women and the freedom of the press to English education, the revenue and judicial systems in India, religious toleration and the plight of the Indian peasantry. He wanted India to become a new and modern country and the Indians to become a virile new people—not, of course, by cutting off our moorings from the past, but by achieving a new integration of our traditional strength with the new scientific disciplines from the West. He was a master of controversy, though never for its own sake, and he met ably both his Indian and foreign critics. He begged, pleaded, argued or exhorted as occasion demanded; fearlessness and an eye for actuality were the sources of his strength; and the main aim of his dedicated endeavours was the total regeneration of India, comprising economic progress, political education, cultural renaissance, and spiritual awakening. Indeed he even seems to have thought of the possible emergence of a League of Nations and processes of arbitration to settle national disputes. In the course of a letter that he addressed to a French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Rammohan Roy wrote:

It is now generally admitted that not only religion, but unbiassed common-sense, as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research, lead to the conclusion that all mankind is one great family, of which

the numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches. Hence enlightened men in all countries must feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner, by removing as far as possible all impediments to it, in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race...

By precept and example he advanced the causes he held dear all along the front, and truly therefore could he be called the first of the great builders of modern India, in whom the seer, the idealist, the reformer, and the shrewd man of affairs were fused in admirable proportion and made him a veritable Titan among men, a fighter and a builder.

Rammohan, although he could be named as the first of the Indian masters of English prose,³ was great in so many fields that he belongs to Indian history more than to mere Indo-Anglian literary history. His mission in England during the last two years (1831-33) of his life augured well for India, and he seems to have made a notable impression on leaders of opinion in England. He even wrote a brief autobiographical sketch on request (which appeared in the *Athenaeum and the Literary Gazette*) and concluded by saying disarmingly: "I hope you will excuse the brevity of this sketch, as I have no leisure at present to enter into particulars". He thus started the tradition of Indian leaders writing autobiographies, and modern autobiographers like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Surendranath Banerjea, Rajendra Prasad and M. R. Jayakar may proudly trace their lineage to him! An Indian scholar, Mr. P. R. Krishnaswami, put forward in the course of an article in the *Cornhill* about 40 years ago the interesting hypothesis that Rummon Loll in Thackeray's *The Newcomes* was really a malicious caricature, based on a study of Rammohan Roy's sojourn in England, and even advanced the opinion that this was the result of family prejudice. Be that as it may, it is a further indication of the great space Rammohan Roy filled in the minds of his admirers and detractors.

Rammohan Roy mastered the English language, and wrote

³ In the *Annals of Oriental Research* of the University of Madras (XVIII, II, 1963), N. Venkata Rao hails Cavally Venkata Boriah (1776-1803) as the "first English prose writer of eminence" and his brother, Cavally Venkata Ramaswamy, as "the first among the Indian writers of English verse".

and spoke forceful English years before Macaulay wrote his Minute. Likewise, the first Indo-Anglian writers of verse and prose—the Cavally Brothers, Derozio, Kashiprosad Ghose, Hasan Ali, P. Rajagopaul, Mohan Lal—belonged, so far as their English education was concerned, to the pre-Macaulay period. Michael Madhusudan Dutt came immediately afterwards. We shall here confine our attention only to three writers: Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), Kashiprosad Ghose (1809-1873), and Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-1873).

Henry Derozio was Indian only on his mother's side, his father being a Portuguese.⁴ At 14 he became a clerk in a firm, but gave vent to his itch for writing English verse. This came to the notice of Dr. John Grant of Calcutta, and Derozio was enabled to become a teacher of English literature in the Hindu College when he was barely eighteen. A poet as well as a teacher of poetry, Derozio loved India and loved Nature; and he also loved his students, whom he addressed thus—

Expanding like the petals of young flowers,
I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
Your intellectual energies and powers
That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)
Their wings to try their strength. O! how the winds
Of circumstance, and freshening April showers
Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
Of new perceptions, shed their influence,
And how you worship Truth's omnipotence!
What joyance rains upon me, when I see
Fame in the mirror of futurity,
Weaving the chaplets you are yet to gain—
And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

He had presently to leave teaching and drift to journalism, and he died of cholera on 23 December 1831, the first of our "inheritors of unfulfilled renown". Mr. Oaten has not inaptly compared Derozio to Keats, "for in both men there was a

⁴ Elliot Walter Madge's 1904 lecture on 'Henry Derozio: The Eurasian Poet & Reformer' has been reprinted (1967) by S. R. Choudhuri, along with the article on Derozio in the *Oriental Magazine* (October 1843).

passionate temperament combined with unbounded sympathy with nature. Both died while their powers were not yet fully developed”.

As a poet, Derozio was obviously influenced by the Romantics—notably Byron, Scott, Moore; but he knew his Shelley and Keats also very well. He seems to have been particularly fond of the sonnet form. The series of five sonnets addressed to ‘Night’ contain arresting lines such as—

For loneliness and thought this is the hour . . .
Swift as the dark eyes’ glance, or falcon’s flight,
Thought comes on thought, awakened by the night...

He had an eye for Nature in its twin aspects of Beauty as well as Terror:

There was a dance among the leaves
That low-breathed minstrelsy
Hymning her influence which binds
The soul to thought intense...

Silence, and rest had no existence there;
The blast shook mightiest trees with its strong breath,
And bent the mountain forests...

In one of his sonnets, Derozio called Death his “best friend”; he is daunted neither by Death nor by Fate—

I vainly call on thee, for fate the more
Her bolts hurls down, as she has ever hurled:
And in my war with her I’ve felt, and feel
Grief’s path cut to my heart by misery’s steel.
But man’s eternal energies can make
An atmosphere around him, and so take
Good out of evil, like the yellow bee,
That sucks from flowers malignant a sweet treasure,
O tyrant fate! thus shall I vanquish thee,
For out of suffering shall I gather pleasure.

The contrast between the glory that was Ind and the plight of the present made Derozio apostrophize his country thus:

My country, in thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow.

And worshipped as a deity thou wast,—
 Where is that glory, where that reverence now?
 The eagle pinion is chained down at last,
 And grovelling in the dust art thou...
 Well, let me dive into the depths of time,
 And bring from out the ages that have rolled
 A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime
 Which human eye may never more behold;
 And let the guerdon of my labour be,
 My fallen country, one kind word for thee.

Poor though his abilities may be, he will to his dying breath
 sing in defence and in praise of his country:

O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
 Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave:
 Those hands are cold, but if those notes divine
 May be by mortal wakened once again,
 Harp of my country, let me strike the strain.

Apart from his shorter lyrics and sonnets which are often
 sensuous and finely articulate, his most ambitious work was
The Fakir of Jungheera, describing the Brahmin widow Nuleeni
 and the strange vicissitudes of her star-crossed life. It is com-
 petent narrative verse with many Byronic echoes, and the
 ardent social reformer too peeps through the poem with a face
 contorted by pain and also lit up with a hope for the future.
 The rock of Jungheera is near Monghyr and, in Derozio's time,
 was the haunt of fakirs or wandering monks. Just when Nuleeni
 is about to be consumed by the flames on the funeral pyre of
 her dead husband, she is carried away by the Fakir, her former
 lover and the chief of the outlaws, and she has a brief new
 lease of life. Nuleeni's absorption in her lover is revealed in
 these lines—

And I would keep thee like a thought
 Which Memory in her temple keeps,
 When every sorrow sinks to nought,
 And all the past of misery sleeps.
 O thus should thy bright image dear
 Above my heart's warm altar sit...

But Nuleeni's father is furious, and a raid against the Fakir's

stronghold follows, and he dies fighting. Nuleeni rushes to the field and clasps the body

as if she dreamed
Of him in her embrace: but they who thought
That life was tenanting her breast, and sought
Some answer from her heart to hush the doubt,
Found that its eloquence had all burnt out.

Nuleeni has found her peace in blissful death in the arms of her dead lover.

Derozio's was a simple and courageous life, and even as he had lived, so he died, brave and noble even in death, and found his resting place in the Park Street cemetery; and as he said in his poem 'The Poet's Grave',

There all in silence, let him sleep his sleep.
No dream shall flit into that slumber deep
No wandering mortal thither once shall wend,
There nothing o'er him but the heavens shall weep
There never pilgrim at his shrine shall bend,
But holy stars alone their nightly vigils keep.

Kashiprosad Ghose's *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830) must find a place in literary history for much the same reason that *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex* finds a place in the history of English drama. Kashiprosad was one of the first Indians to publish a regular volume of English verse. He was educated at the Hindu College and passed out in 1828, and he edited an English weekly, *The Hindu Intelligence*. His was derivative and imitative poetry, made up mainly of conventional descriptions and tedious moralizing, but it is a tedium brightened by odd flashes of originality, and thus a bright poetic phrase or line occasionally glistens amidst the heap of the utterly prosaic and the inane. For illustration, a single passage in which Kashiprosad describes 'The Moon in September' should suffice:

How like the breath of love the rustling breeze
Is breathing through the fragrant sandal trees!
How sad but sweet the Bulbul sings above...
Like liquid silver yon soft-gliding stream
Wanders and glistens in the lunar beam,

Which like a modest maid, in love and fear
 Shrinks half-reluctant, from the clasp so dear
 Of frequent-heaving waves. But see! a cloud
 Hath wrapt the Moon like Beauty in a shroud . . .
 Region of bliss! Irradiate gem of night!
 Soother of sorrows! Orb of gentle light!
 For still, resplendent Moon! whene'er we see
 Thy placid face, and fondly gaze on thee,
 Its gentleness upon the wounded soul
 Exerts a healing power and calm control.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was an infinitely more gifted writer—indeed there is no comparison between them. A Hindu by birth, he embraced Christianity and worked on an English paper in Madras; he married a European lady, came to England and qualified for the bar, but failed to make a living as a lawyer. His fame now rests securely on his great Bengali epic, *Meghanad Badha*, centering round the heroic figure of Indrajit, Ravana's son. But in his earlier days, Madhusudan essayed freely English prose, verse, and even drama. His narrative poem *The Captive Ladie* appeared in Madras in 1849, and like Derozio's *Fakir* revealed the influence of the English romantics, especially Byron. In the following lines Madhusudan tries to evoke Muhammad Ghazni's vision of the contemplated slaughter of the besieged Hindus of Old Delhi—

A thousand lamps all gaily shine
 Along the wide extended line;
 And loud the laugh and proud the boast
 Swells from that fierce, unnumbered host;
 And wild the prayer ascends on high—
 Dark vengeance thine impatient cry—
 "Oh! for a glimpse of Day's fair brow
 To crush yon city towering now,
 To make each Kaffir bosom feel
 The unerring blade of Moslem steel!
 By Alla! how I long to be
 Where myriads writhe in agony,
 And mark each wretch with rolling eye
 Call on false gods, then curse and die,
 Meet pilgrim for the dire domain...
 Tomorrow—Oh! why wilt thou, Night!
 Thus veil the smile of Day so bright?...
 We want thee not—the brightest flood

The fiery sun can ever shed
Must blaze o'er warriors' deeds of blood,
And light him on whene'er he tread
The field where foemen, fierce and brave,
Meet, slay, or win a bloody grave.

Like Derozio's, Madhusudan's too was a chequered life; he too died, though not very young, yet before his creative powers could complete the full arc of fulfilment. To Bengali poets, Madhusudan is something of a poets' poet, and it is fitting to close with Sri Aurobindo's tribute—

No human hands such notes ambrosial moved;
These accents are not of the imperfect earth;
Rather the god was voiceful in their birth,
The god himself of the enchanting flute,
The god himself took up thy pen and wrote.

III

The Renaissance In India

Towards the end of my last talk, I referred to the work of the precocious Henry Derozio "the marvellous boy who perished in his prime", though not before blazing the trail for many a younger man who had studied under him in the Hindu College. Derozio had indeed taken a large view of his duties as a teacher; he not only taught English literature, but also made his pupils ask questions, think for themselves, and not shrink from the right answers. The ruling ideas of the French Revolution and the poetry of the great English Romantics fired his imagination, and he communicated this fire to the more eager among his pupils. The 'old order' in India, which was more of a diseased disorder, came in for much castigation, and Hindu beliefs and customs were subjected to withering ridicule. When Derozio was compelled by the opposition of orthodoxy to his intellectual incendiarism to give up teaching and turn to journalism for a living, this only further raised him in the estimation of many of his former wards, while his early death added the necessary touch of martyrdom to his life. The 'Derozio men' became rather a law unto themselves, and they went further than Derozio himself would have gone or have liked them to go. They played the iconoclasts in many obvious ways, defied orthodoxy in terms of cheap exhibitionism, and generally behaved like thoroughly irresponsible young men. The West meant merely unadulterated freedom to them,—but for other Western values they cared little. In short, they were nihilists, intoxicated with a sense of false importance; they were just rootless beings, with dark despair seated at the centre of their lives.

For the missionaries this was a favourable climate for proselytization. One cannot live in despair for long, and the missionaries were able to cajole some of the 'Derozio men' into accepting the certitudes of the Christian faith. The missionaries

and the new Christian converts now carried on a ceaseless war against Hinduism, and the converts became Westernized in every way, despising everything Indian. The Babu became anglicized overnight in name, dress, manners, speech; in Professor S. Radhakrishnan's words, the Babu's voice now became "an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain, and his free spirit a slave to things". Although there was no Derozio in Bombay or Madras, the situation there too was not very different from the situation in Bengal. The new education took long and rapid strides in Western and South India, and Christianity made deep inroads into the former preserves of Hinduism. Especially was the conversion of high caste Hindus (and in Bombay, Parsis also) both a bright feather in the missionary's cap and a shock to Indian complacency. At last the leaders among the Hindus awoke to a realization of the peril, and decided that the peril should be met squarely and turned back once and for all.

On the whole Madras was more conservative than Bombay, and Bombay more conservative than Calcutta, though it was in South India that, owing to historic reasons, Christianity established its first strongholds. Side by side with the missionary institutions, Hindu or Native schools and colleges were now started, and it is said that Rabindranath Tagore's father, Maharshi Debendranath, himself went from house to house from morning till evening, entreating Hindu parents not to send their children to missionary schools but only to native schools. Nevertheless, Western education was as yet carrying all before it. It was the 'open sesame' to knowledge, freedom, power; it cut the old bonds of convention and tradition; it let in light into the old dark rooms of an obscurantist faith; and it made a new world and a new life possible for its beneficiaries. In the words of Surendranath Banerjea,

Our fathers, the first fruits of English education, were violently pro-British. They could see no flaw in the civilization or culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness. The enfranchisement of the individual, the substitution of the right of private judgement in the place of traditional authority, the exaltation of duty over custom, all came with the force and suddenness of a revelation to an Oriental people who knew no more binding obligation than the mandate of immemorial usage and venerable tradition

Everything English was good—even the drinking of brandy was a virtue; everything not English was to be viewed with suspicion...

Even when they didn't embrace Christianity, they often made it clear that they had no use for Hindu bigotries and superstitions, and tried to Westernize their lives and even their outlook on life. The women, however, often resisted this pull, but this only made for a divided home, and so the anglicized Indian sometimes had the worst of both worlds, the West and the East.

Raja Rammohan Roy had been attracted to the West, he too had been repelled by Hindu practices and beliefs. But *he* was cast in a different mould, and he was always able to look beneath the appearance and see into the truth of things. He saw that in the West, too, Christian profession and practice could be widely divergent. As for Hinduism, he went to the Vedas and the Upanishads. Many gods were no doubt mentioned, but transcending them all was Brahman. 'All is Brahman'; 'I am Brahman'; 'That thou Art'. These basic affirmations of the Hindu faith had nothing to do with idolatry, caste, *sati*, and the many other foolish, futile, or criminal practices and beliefs in the Hindu fold. Back, then, to the fount of Hinduism; the deep well of its living waters would be seen to mix and merge with the springs of other religions also. In his time Rammohan stood almost alone, while the storms of detraction blew around him. With a few select friends he held counsel from time to time on the perennial truths of all religions, and so the Brahma Sabha or Brahmo Samaj was founded in 1828. His work was continued by Prince Dwaraknath Tagore, an intrepid figure who also paid a visit to England, and his son Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. In its great days, members of the Brahmo Samaj were required to take these seven vows—

1. By loving God and performing the works which He loves, I will worship God, the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer, the Giver of Salvation, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Blissful, the Good, the Formless, the One only without a Second.
2. I will worship no created object as the Creator.
3. Except the day of sickness or tribulation, every day, the mind being undisturbed, I will engage in love and veneration of God.
4. I will exert myself to perform righteous deeds.
5. I will be careful to keep myself from vicious deeds.

6. If, through the influence of passion, I have committed any vice, I will, wishing redemption from it, be careful not to do it again.

7. Every year, and on the occasion of every happy domestic event, I will bestow gifts upon the Brahmo Samaj. Grant me, O God, power to observe the duties of this great faith.

A great event in the history of the Brahmo Samaj was the meeting of Debendranath and Keshub Chunder Sen in 1857. For the next ten years the two worked together, and the Brahmo Samaj was a power in Bengal, the meeting point of both the religious and the cultural renaissance. But Keshub was more and more attracted to Christ and his Gospel, though he always gave it a Hindu twist, and this in time brought about a split in the Brahmo Samaj. Keshub organized his own Church in 1866 with the help of his cousin Protap Chandra Mazoomdar, while the parent body continued, first as Adi Brahmo Samaj, and later as Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, on conservative lines with Debendranath, Ananda Mohan Bose (a Cambridge Wrangler), and the journalist Akshaya Kumar Datta as its leading spirits. In still later times, the poet Tagore himself tried to close the ranks between the different wings of the Samaj, but without any material success. Judged by mere numbers, neither the original Brahmo Samaj nor any of its sub-sects had what may be called an impressive following either in Bengal or in the rest of India, but many of the leaders of the community were Samajists of one or another hue, and thus the Samaj may be truly said to have played a vital role in Bengal's (and India's) cultural history during the 19th century.

Raja Rammohan Roy had started on several fronts the great task of national reconstruction,¹ and different men were destined to follow his lead in the different directions. Thus Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar became the most determined social reformer after Rammohan, a scholar and a controversialist of eminence, "an intellectual gladiator whom no adversary could overawe or overcome in argument". Likewise, the task of religious regeneration was taken up by Kesub Chunder Sen (1838-1884). Though

¹ "The vision of the modern age with its multitude of claim and activities", said Rabindranath Tagore, "shone clear before his (Rammohan's) eye, and it was he who truly introduced it to his country before that age itself completely found its own mind".

misunderstood in his time, he too came to fulfil and not to destroy. He sincerely felt that Christianity was not incompatible with the spirit of Hinduism, and he felt also that a close understanding between India and England was possible. He was an impassioned speaker, and his oratory made a profound effect on his hearers in India as well as in England. After Keshub's visit to England in 1870, Max Muller thought that Keshub was a sort of Martin Luther for our times and was struck by the fact that "his (Keshub's) name had become almost a household word in England". How adroitly Keshub tried to forge the links between England and India, and Christianity and Hinduism, may be seen from these few extracts—

"Let, then, India learn from England practical righteousness. Let England learn from India devotion, faith and prayer."

"You will find on reflection that the doctrine of divine humanity is essentially a Hindu doctrine, and the picture of Christ's life and character I have drawn is altogether a picture of ideal Hindu life. Surely the idea of absorption and immersion in the Deity is one of those ideas of Vedantic Hinduism which prevail extensively in India..."

"Let India, beloved India, be dressed in all her jewellery—those 'sparkling orient gems' for which this land is famous, so that at the time of the wedding we may find her a really happy and glorious bride. The bridegroom is coming. Let India be ready in due season."

"The Hindu shall eat Thy (Christ's) flesh in rice and drink Thy blood in pure water, so that the scripture may be fulfilled in this land."

But Keshub could also speak in another strain, paint a vivid picture of the sorrowing East, and peremptorily call Europe to order. His lecture on 'Asia's Message to Europe' given in 1883, the last year of his life, was typical of the man and his powers of oratory—

Behold the sweet angel of the East, into whose beauty the very colours of heaven seem to have been woven—the fair East 'in russet mantle clad' lies prostrate, a bleeding prisoner!... The desperate onslaughts of Europe's haughty civilization, she says, have brought sorrow into her heart, ignominy on her fair name, and death to her cherished institutions... Alas! before the formidable artillery of Europe's aggressive civilization, the scriptures and prophets, the language and literature of the East, nay her customs and manners, her social and domestic institutions, and her very industries have undergone a cruel slaughter. The rivers that flow eastward and the rivers

that flow westward are crimson with Asiatic gore; yes, with the best blood of oriental life. Enough. Stay, Europe, desist from this sanguinary strife...

This is no doubt the style of an earlier day, but in his time Keshub seems to have created a great impression on his hearers. He was boldly classed with Gladstone and Gambetta, and the Rev. Joseph Cook declared: "He is an orator born, not made. He has a splendid physique, excellent quality of organization, capacity of sudden heat and of tremendous impetuosity, and lightning-like swiftness of thought and expression, combined with a most iron self-control".

Such was Keshub Chunder Sen, one of the most remarkable men produced during the ferment of the 19th century. A not less important figure was the Hindu leader from the Punjab, Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj. The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj had, in their different ways, tried to effect a marriage of India and the West, to build a bridge between Hindu spirituality and Christian thought, to gain in short the best of both worlds. Dayanand Saraswati, however, wanted only a return to Hinduism in its pristine Vedic simplicity, clarity and spirituality, and asked for a determined elimination of the accumulated accretions of the ages. Describing Dayanand in memorable terms, Sri Aurobindo says—

It is as if one were to walk for a long time amid a range of hills rising to a greater or lesser altitude, but all with sweeping contours, green-clad, flattering the eye even in their most bold and striking elevation. But amidst them all, one hill stands apart, piled up in sheer strength, a mass of bare and puissant granite, with verdure on its summit, a solitary pine jutting out into the blue, a great cascade of pure, vigorous and fertilizing water gushing out from its strength as a very fountain of life and health to the valley.

To purify and to preserve Hinduism were Dayanand's cardinal objectives, and to achieve these ends he organized the Arya Samaj in 1875. *Stuti* (praise), *prarthana* (prayer) and *upasana* (community) were to be the means of realization, while even the non-Hindu was to be proselytized, if he desired, by means of *suddhi* (purification), *sangathan* (union) and *vidya* (national education). Dayanand's work was continued by Lala Hansraj,

Swami Sraddhanand and Lala Lajpat Rai, and the Arya Samaj remains a power even today, now as always playing the part of the Church Militant (somewhat like the Society of Jesus in Europe after the Reformation) in Hindu society, being rather more intimately associated with the deeper springs of Hindu tradition than the Brahmo Samaj.

In Bombay, however, the movement for religious reform or regeneration took the form of Prarthana Samaj, less eclectic than the Brahmo Samaj and less militant than the Arya Samaj. Poona and Bombay were important intellectual centres during the second half of the 19th century, and there was besides a cosmopolitan atmosphere in Bombay that made it unique among the cities of India. Many of the young men that passed out of the colleges were possessed of an idealism and a capacity for intellectual discipline that were rather exceptional. In the following passage of sustained eloquence, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar describes vividly the times in which men like Telang and Ranade underwent the baptism of their leadership—

It was an age of splendour when humanity seemed to stand at the start of a quickened life, with the promise of a bright future for modern civilization. In politics, it was the age of the Reform Bill, of Free Trade, of the Abolition of Slavery, of statesmen of towering personalities like Palmerston, Peel, Gladstone, Disraeli, Cobden, Bright, Clarkson and Wilberforce. In social reform it was the age of the Emancipation of Women, of Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale. In literature, which for the period reflects its currents and character and the ideals of its people, it was the age of Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning, reflecting through them 'the mighty hopes that make us men'. The spirit was of humanity, of good things, of great joy for all, breathed by the times in nearly all departments of life and human activity... The Professors of English, Scotch or Irish, who came to teach in our colleges and share in the work of our universities, were men, who more or less breathed this spirit of the times and sought to impart it to the young men brought within the sphere of their influence. These young men caught the ardour, the sentiment of humanity and of the brotherhood of the human race, man's growing power as Nature's conqueror and interpreter, and placed as they were—on account of the superstition of ages—where all seemed dark, they felt that a light appeared to them in the very midst of the surrounding darkness... They lived in an environment of hope realized, of help and encouragement given all round. But their aim was a life of fullness... The first two or three generations

of our men of higher education were men of liberal thought, a wide outlook on life and humane sentiment.

These were not like the 'Derozio men', but men seized with purpose, men who took themselves seriously, and thought and counselled and acted as responsible and mature leaders of a people just awakening from the stupor of the ages. Social reform, educational reform, and religious reform had to go together; these would lead to economic progress; and this in turn would pave the way for political emancipation in the fullness of time.

Such was the intellectual and moral climate which brought into existence institutions like the Paramahansa Sabha (1849) and the Prarthana Samaj (1867), which evidently grew out of the former and laid the main emphasis on the pure worship of God. The Prarthana Samaj did not dissociate itself from the parent Hindu community—didn't flirt with Christianity—didn't establish a separate Church as Keshub tried to do—didn't attempt proselytization—but was content to continue the tradition of the prophets and saints of Maharashtra like Jnanadev, Eknath, Namadev, Tukaram and Ramdas. Of the leaders of the movement only two need be mentioned here, Kashinath Trim-bak Telang (1850-1893) and Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901).

Kashinath Telang was a remarkable lad. It is said he read almost every new book he could lay his hands on, and that he read Browning's *The Ring and the Book* three times through to take in its full meaning; besides, he read and re-read John Stuart Mill till he became a part of Telang himself. He was deeply read in English and Sanskrit, and he translated the *Bhagavad Gita* for the Sacred Books of the East Series. He was an able lawyer, and was duly elevated to the High Court Bench, and served for a time as Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University. His speeches and writings on legal, literary, educational, social, religious and political problems were marked by simplicity and lucidity, a flair for cogent reasoning, and the absence of mere rhetoric or bombast—for not in vain had he made Mill the exemplar of English prose. Speaking of Telang's oratory, Sir Raymond West has remarked—

Telang showed remarkable sagacity and judgement in taking up

his positions. He maintained them with great dialectical skill and in language of a limpid purity that would have done credit to an English born orator. He was an assiduous student of Bright's speeches... He could rise with the popular feeling, but he could not sink with it below the level of his own magnanimity.

It was said of Telang that he had a perfect House of Commons style, capable of playing "upon the moods of an intellectual audience with the skill of a musician upon a familiar instrument". Above all, Telang was an educator in excelsis, for he felt that without right knowledge there could be no right ground for action. In the words of his biographer, Mr. Vasant Narayan Naik—

There is an art of examination in all his writings... It is an essentially Socratic method... Large views, balance, equipoise, lofty ideas alone enable a man to effect a synthesis between the old and the new. The spread of correct views was especially necessary in the transition stage of society. Public opinion, he felt, was a balance of many forces, and every force must come into play so that opinion may be rational, enlightened, and progressive. To build up such an opinion was the task to which he set himself. He poured all his mind, energy and heart into that one aim. Learning, scholarship, leadership, the spiritual grace of character—all these were directed to that end. That is his glory, that is his claim on posterity.

Less brilliant perhaps than Telang, Ranade was yet the greater man. The late V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, surely no mean judge of men and affairs, has paid this tribute to Ranade—

...the great Ranade, whom perhaps the most compendious way of describing would be to call him the 'Father of Modern India'... There was not any department of knowledge where he did not hold an eminent position; there was not any department of public activity where he was not a leading light; and there was not an aspect of national welfare where he was not a devout worker. Mr. Ranade was an unrivalled figure, and he had, what few leaders have, the marvellous gift of attracting young and promising men and giving that turn to their minds and hearts which renders them great instruments of public welfare.

And Ranade had a lieutenant in G. V. Joshi, only a poor Head Master, but great in his own way—an unrivalled student of India's economic problems. Later, Gopal Krishna Gokhale be-

came Ranade's disciple, and carried forward the work the Master had begun. Ranade was a scholar, economist, and jurist of unquestionable distinction; he wrote in English his classic *Rise of the Maratha Power*; and he believed that the varied races of India could really fuse into a nation. "His one aspiration through life was", said Gokhale once, "that India should be roused from the lethargy of centuries, so that she might become a great and living nation, responsive to truth and justice and self-respect, responsive to all the claims of man's higher nature, animated by lofty ideals, and undertaking great national tasks". His activities were manifold—the Prarthana Samaj, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, its Quarterly Journal, the Oratory Encouragement Society, the Indian National Congress. In the days of his 'nonage', he taught history, geography, mathematics, logic, economics, and English poetry and contributed articles to the *Indu Prakash*. But early or late, always was Ranade a prince among men. He was no orator who swept one off one's feet with the first few sentences. He started slowly but gained momentum as he went along. Two examples of his restrained oratory may be given here: this from a speech made in 1893—

We bandy words about freedom and independence, but of their meaning many have no clear idea. Freedom means making laws, levying taxes, imposing punishment, and appointing officials. The true difference between a free country and an unfree one is that in the former, before punishment is given, a law must have been made; before taxes are levied, consent must have been secured; before making a law, opinions must have been taken.

And this from the address to the Social Conference held in 1896—

With a liberated manhood, with buoyant hope, with a faith that never shirks duty, with a sense of justice that deals fairly to all, with unclouded intellect and powers fully cultivated, and, lastly, with a love that overleaps all bounds, renovated India will take her proper rank among the nations of the world, and be the master of the situation and of her own destiny. This is the goal to be reached—this is the promised land. Happy are they who see it in distant vision; happier those who are permitted to work and clear the way on to it; happiest they who live to see it with their eyes and tread upon the holy soil once more.

Ranade has also been called rightly the Father of Indian Economics; and Mr. A. O. Hume, the Founder of the Indian National Congress, himself called Ranade his "political guru". As a politician he chose the slow hard way of self-education and adequate preparation, while as an economist he argued that the laissez faire doctrines of Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricardo were not absolutes, and pleaded for state intervention in the context of India's economic backwardness—thus anticipating the views of modern economists like Keynes and Myrdal.

Ranade and Telang were choice spirits, and Bombay and all India benefited greatly from their educative work. Of the two, Telang was more intellectual, Ranade more intuitive; Telang was a thinker, an advocate, a wise counsellor, but Ranade was not only these but also a sage who knew all, and suffered all, and was ready with consolation at the right time. In Justice Candy's words, Ranade had indeed "the patience of the saints, he was entirely free from guile or hypocrisy, and everyone was spontaneously drawn to him".

Like Ranade and Telang, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar also was journalist, judge, orator, politician, Prarthana Samajist, all rolled into one. His speeches and writings—whatever their subject, social reform, education or literature—drew upon his vast reservoir of knowledge and experience. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) was in a class apart; he taught at the Elphinstone College, entered the British Parliament in 1892, published his *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* in 1902, and twice presided over the Indian National Congress. Another stalwart from Bombay, Phirozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), was an impressive and many-sided personality who gave his best to his city, Province and all India.

Bengal, the Punjab, Bombay—and now, Madras. The new education gave Madras a succession of able lawyers, jurists, teachers, journalists and administrators. There was Sir F. Muthuswami Ayyar, a great judge, who urged that India should assimilate Western culture, science and institutions; and that people educated in English should try to modernise the vernaculars into efficient instruments of expression. There was Sir V. Bhashyam Aiyengar, one of the subtlest and ablest masters of advocacy; there was C. Rangacharlu, who was a great success

as Dewan of Mysore; and there were journalists like G. Subramania Ayyar and scholars like V. Kanakasabhai. But, strangely enough, the real ferment in Madras came from an initially foreign movement, the Theosophical Society. If the Brahmo Samaj was an Indian attempt to link the indigenous and Western springs of spirituality, the Theosophical Society was a Western attempt to fuse with the springs of Indian spirituality. Founded at New York in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky, Col. Olcott and William Q. Judge, the Society shifted to Adyar near Madras in 1878, and has since functioned from there. Annie Besant, as President of the Society, gathered many prominent Indians round her, and the Society opened branches in many cities all over India. She was again not a little responsible for the starting of the Central Hindu College at Banaras and other educational institutions, and her many-sided ministry is a notable chapter of recent Indian history.

But none of these movements—neither the Brahmo Samaj nor the Theosophical Society, neither the Arya Samaj nor the Prarthana Samaj—was a really effective or final answer to the 'challenge' from the West, which, paradoxically enough, had a Janus-face: the face of English education and its sense of power, and the face of Jesus Christ, and its transcendent light of holiness. If the doubting Hindu was to be made to believe, a new living manifestation of Indian spirituality was called for. The old 'avatars' and Messiahs—Rama and Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja, the mystic singers and saints—were dimmed by distance, while Rammohan Roy, Keshub Sen, Dayanand, and Ranade were but superlatively gifted men, not 'avatars' or Messiahs. And Ramakrishna Paramahansa occurred at the nick of time, occurred in Bengal, and modern India had the Messiah she needed to salvage and save Indian culture and set it on new foundations. Romain Rolland rightly saw in Ramakrishna "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people"; and though no more present in the flesh, "his soul animates modern India".

Ramakrishna was born on 17 February 1836 within a stone's throw as it were of Calcutta, became a priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, married Sarada Devi (it was a marriage in the spirit), and passed away in 1886. He was not only ignorant

of English, he was actually an illiterate man. He was subject to trances. He was, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "a self-illuminated ecstatic and mystic without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him". Yet the flower of the intellectual aristocracy of the time crowded round him, hung upon his lips, and found in him an answer to its obstreperous doubts and questionings. Others spoke about truth and discussed it or tried to argue you into it; but Ramakrishna was the Truth. People who went to see him felt that he was the Truth, as Christ told Pilate, "I am the Truth". Parables tumbled from his lips. His mysticism was like the ether and embraced the West and the East, all religions, all paths and all forms of realization. He was the living embodiment of human unity through God-realization. The appeal he made was to the lotus of the human heart which at once opened out, petal by petal, and in its full splendour dedicated its beauty and joy to the Supreme. In baby-cat fashion, the frail and the erring were lifted up by his winged love and taken to the haven of redemption. Love, after all, is the final law of life. Without love there can be no true giving or taking; and love—love emancipated and purified—is the pathway to felicity here and hereafter.

However, the occurrence of Ramakrishna meant no turning back on the West; only, he made it possible for the Indian intellectual to take the best that the West had to give him, yet not give up the spiritual heritage of his forefathers. When Ramakrishna passed away, his chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda, established the Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual and humanitarian movement that has been doing notable work. Vivekananda's own writings and speeches are spread over many volumes. He spoke with knowledge as well as conviction and a sense of urgency, and he was a very effective speaker, bold, audacious, fluent, and essentially educative. Occasionally he essayed English verse, too, and a piece like 'Kali the Mother' is almost an apocalyptic vision of the breaking of the worlds and the Dance of Doom—

The stars are blotted out,
The clouds are covering clouds,
It is darkness vibrant, sonant.
In the roaring, whirling wind

Are the souls of a million lunatics,—
 Just loose from the prison house,—
 Wrenching trees by the roots,
 Sweeping all from the path.
 The sea has joined the fray,
 And swirls up mountain-waves,
 To reach the pitchy sky.
 The flash of lurid light
 Reveals on every side
 A thousand, thousand shades
 Of Death begrimed and black—
 Scattering plagues and sorrows,
 Dancing mad with joy.

Come, Mother, come!

For Terror is Thy name,
 Death is in Thy breath,
 And every shaking step
 Destroys a world for e'er.
 Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!

Come, O Mother, come!

Who dares misery love,
 And hug the form of Death,
 Dance in Destruction's dance,
 To him the Mother comes.

This may be compared with the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati's 'Oozhik-koothu', equally powerful in its evocation of the frenzy of the creatrix who turns the destroyer of the worlds. A few stanzas from Vivekananda's Vedantic 'Song of the Free' may also be quoted—

Let eyes grow dim and heart grow faint
 And friendship fail and love betray,
 Let Fate its hundred horrors send
 And clotted darkness block the way—

All nature wear one angry frown
 To crush you out—still know, my soul,
 You are Divine. March on and on,
 Nor right nor left, but to the goal!...

From dreams awake, from bonds be free!
 Be not afraid. This mystery,

My shadow, cannot frighten me!
Know once for all that I am He!

Equally characteristic of the Swami are 'The Song of the Sannyasin', 'Angels Unawares', 'My Play is Done' and some of the English verse renderings he made from his own Bengali.

Today the principal organ of the Ramakrishna Mission is the monthly English journal *Prabuddha Bharata*. It was, however, first published from Madras, and its editor then was B. R. Rajam Iyer, a precocious Yogi—a scholar steeped in English, Sanskrit and Tamil—who died at the age of twenty-six. His *Kamalambul* is one of the great novels in Tamil, perhaps the first of Tamil novels. His English novel, *Vasudeva Sastri*, and his philosophical essays and portraits of the saints, all written in pellucid prose, are collected in the volume *Rambles in Vedanta* (1905). It is a book in a thousand, and forms an admirable introduction to Indian philosophy; it is, besides, an illustration of good Indian prose writing in English, unaffected, sensitive, persuasive, not lacking in the play of light and shade, and rising occasionally to sheer poetic heights. As for the novel, although it sometimes descends to the level of burlesque, the central character, Vasudeva Sastri, is delineated convincingly as exemplifying the *Gita* ideal of the *sthitha-prajna* or the man of steady wisdom and enlightenment:

...a middle-aged man of fair complexion and well-proportioned limbs; his face was the most remarkable thing about him. There was a calmness and a serenity in it, a gentleness, a sweetness and a luxuriant cheerfulness like that of a full-blown lotus-flower, which an ancient rishi might have envied; and in his large, beautiful eyes, there was an angelic expression of goodness, which by its silent and sweet magic could have soothed the anger of a Durvasa. The glory of these eyes, if I may say so, lay not in occasional lightning-flashes but in their constant and continued revelation of the ocean of goodness, love and calmness that dwelt within... He seemed to depend for his happiness on nothing outside and he was never known to be excited either by pleasure or by pain, and much less get angry.

Left incomplete, for all its delicate mingling of light and shade, and the play of humour and fantasy, the novel is a promise more than an achievement; but like Derozio, Rajam Iyer too died young before he could redeem the promise of his youth.

IV

Toru Dutt

Beauty and tragedy and fatality criss-crossed in the life of Toru Dutt, and it is difficult, when talking about her poetry, to make any nice distinction between poetry and what C. S. Lewis would call 'poetolatry'. The poetry is the reality, no doubt, but the poet too compels attention. When we read Emily Bronte's poems or her novel *Wuthering Heights*, speculation starts and makes all kinds of guesses, and the 'might have beens' both fascinate and depress us. So it is with Toru Dutt.

She had a rich and respectable ancestry. The Dutts were important people in Calcutta. Her father, Govin Chunder Dutt, was well-to-do, a good linguist, and a cultured man with literary leanings and generous impulses. Her mother was steeped in the Hindu myths, and was a woman of loving and sweet disposition. Like other young men of the time, the Dutts too were attracted by the glamour of the West and the Gospel of Christ, and in a body some members of the family embraced Christianity in 1862. Toru was then 6 years old (she was born on 4 March 1856), her elder sister Aru was 8, and their brother Abju was 11. It is clear that the change of faith caused a temporary estrangement between the parents, as may be inferred from Govin's poem addressed to his wife—

Nay, part not so—one moment stay,
Repel me not with scorn.
Like others, wilt thou turn away,
And leave me quite forlorn?
Wilt thou too join the scoffing crowd,
The cold, the heartless, and the proud,
Who curse the hallowed morn
When, daring idols to disown,
I knelt before the Saviour's throne?

Mrs. Govin, however, seems later to have reconciled herself

to the new situation, and indeed to have become an ardent Christian. Hers was on the whole a life of trial and tribulation, but she bore all with angelic patience and died in peace, exemplifying, in Bishop Clifford's words, "the great Christian saying, 'Death is swallowed up in Victory'."

To return to the children, Abju, Aru and Toru. Of his son, Govin wrote—

Most loving is my eldest, and I love him most;
Almost a man in seeming, yet a child...

and thus of Aru—

My next, the beauty of our home, is meek;
Not so deep-loving haply, but less wild
Than her dear brother;—brow and blushing cheek
Her nature shows serene, and pure, and mild
As evening's early star;

and thus to Toru—

Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses,
Self-willed and shy, ne'er heeding that I call,
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
To bird and cat,—but most intelligent...

The children had a private tutor, but of course Govin himself took a hand in their education and carefully supervised their studies. Now came the first calamity: Abju died, aged only 14, in 1865, and so the sisters clung closer together than ever. They read *Paradise Lost* repeatedly, and generally lost themselves in literary studies.

In 1869, the family left for Europe, and the girls went to a French School at Nice for a time. Presently they reached London and took a furnished house. By and by the girls began to turn their knowledge of both French and English into good account by translating French lyrics into English verse. They had company, too, English as well as Indian, and talk was free. But the younger sister seems to have been more forward in conversation or action than the elder. Among their Indian friends was Romesh Chunder Dutt, their cousin, who was then

in London preparing for the Civil Service Examination. Soon after their arrival in London came out *The Dutt Family Album* (1870), containing about 200 pieces, Govin Dutt's contributions being mainly of a didactic character. His brothers and a nephew of his, Omesh Chunder, were the other contributors to the volume. Although of no particular merit, the volume at least throws light on the atmosphere of Govin Dutt's house, which was evidently favourable to literary exertion and creation. In fact, an ideal atmosphere for Aru and Toru.

In 1871 the family moved to Cambridge where Aru and Toru attended the so-called 'Higher Lectures for Women' and made friends with Mary Martin, who was to be Toru's life-long friend and the recipient of most of her letters. In September 1873, the family returned to Calcutta, where they divided their time between the city house 'Rambhagan', 12, Manicktolla Street, and the garden house at Baugmaree. Hardly a few months after their return, tragedy darkened their life a second time, for Aru succumbed to consumption on 23 July 1874. "The Lord has taken Aru from us", wrote Toru to her Cambridge friend, Mary; "It is a sore trial for us, but His will be done. We know He doeth all things for our good..." She added further that her father was planning to return to England and settle down in Westmoreland because of its Wordsworthian associations—Wordsworth being Govin's favourite poet.

Toru's sunniness, however, remained, although darkened now and then by the memory of a lost brother and a lost sister. She got ready for the press her renderings from the French into English, and these appeared in 1875 with the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Of the 165 pieces, 8 were by Aru, and Toru had also added notes on the French poets represented in the volume.

The *Sheaf* had a good press in India, and Toru's uncles and cousins praised her effort in generous terms. In England the book fell into the hands of Edmund Gosse, and, opening it at random, he read with "surprise and almost rapture" Aru's rendering of Victor Hugo's 'Morning Serenade'—

Still barred thy doors! the far east glows,
The morning wind blows fresh and free.

Should not the hour that wakes the rose
Awaken also thee?

All look for thee, Love, Light, and Song,
Light in the sky deep red above,
Song, in the lark of pinions strong,
And in my heart, true Love.

Apart we miss our nature's goal,
Why strive to cheat our destinies?
Was not my love made for thy soul?
Thy beauty for mine eyes?

No longer sleep,
Oh, listen now!
I wait and weep,
But where art thou?—

and exclaimed: "When poetry is as good as this, it does not matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore".

Although Toru returned from time to time to the *Sheaf* either to revise it or to add a piece or two in anticipation of a possible second edition, already she was feeling the "need for roots", and father and daughter had begun studying Sanskrit. The following extracts from her letters to Mary Martin tell an inspiring tale—

"I have now nothing to do, so Papa and I are going to take up Sanskrit. It is a difficult language, and it is hard to learn it properly in less than 6 or 7 years". (23 November 1875)

"We have begun Sanskrit: the pundit is very pleased with our eagerness to learn... It is a very difficult language... especially the grammar, which is dreadful". (4 December 1875)

"We are going on with our Sanskrit. When we have finished the book we are reading now, we shall take up Valmiki's *Ramayana*". (13 January 1876)

"The Sanskrit is going on tolerably well; we are now reading the *Ramayana*". (24 April 1876)

"Our Sanskrit is going but slowly. We are now reading extracts from the *Mahabharata*". (13 May 1876)

"We are now reading *Sakuntala* in Sanskrit". (7 August 1876)

"I am translating some small Sanskrit pieces". (26 August 1876)

"I hope I shall be able to bring out another 'Sheaf', not gleaned in French but in 'Sanskrit Fields';... I have only as yet gathered two ears..." (6 September 1876)

23 November to 6 September: not quite 10 months—but Toru has learned Sanskrit, laved in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and *Sakuntala*, has translated a few tales from the original Sanskrit into English verse, and in spite of ill health is planning a companion *Sheaf* gleaned in 'Sanskrit Fields'!

It was all too good to last much longer. She was ill, very ill; she had recurrent attacks of fever and cough spasms; she spat a great deal of blood, which left her "quite weak and prostrate". She was obliged to keep within doors, and even writing letters was an effort she could not stand. It is a harrowing tale, though not lacking in heroism. The end came at last on 30 August 1877. "Her end here was very peaceful and happy", wrote Govin to Mary Martin, "and her mother and myself will never, never forget the expression that was on her face when all was over. Such a glory there was on it . . ." She was buried at the C. M. S. Cemetery in Calcutta, near her brother and sister.

Govin, having lost all his three children one after another, set himself the task of publishing a new enlarged edition of the *Sheaf* and bringing out the other *Sheaf* that had been in Toru's thoughts. The second Indian edition of the *Sheaf* came out in 1878 and included nearly 200 pieces, while the third edition was issued in England by Kegan Paul with a Foreword by Arthur Symons. The other *Sheaf* gleaned in 'Sanskrit Fields' came out in 1882 with the title *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and carried an Introduction by Edmund Gosse. Meantime her unfinished English novel, *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* appeared in the *Bengal Magazine* (January-April 1878) and her French novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* had been issued in Paris in 1879 and had been hailed as "an extraordinary feat, without precedent" and compared to the *Vathek* of Beckford. And all this by a sick girl, who had known Pain and been shadowed by a sense of fatality, in the course of 3 or 4 years!

The first promising streaks of the morn: the Sun itself peeping out for a second, a bare second: and the clouds immediately

swinging across and blotting out everything, as if for ever! How could we speculate, under such circumstances, on what the day might have been had the clouds not intervened? Aru was womanlier even than Toru—fragiler in her femineity—and all we have from her are a few translations. 'Morning Serenade's is exquisite, and almost as moving are the following lines—

O echo, whose repose I mar
 With my regrets and mournful cries,
 He comes—I hear his voice afar,
 Or is it thine that thus replies?
 Peace! hark, he calls!—in vain, in vain,
 The loved and lost come not again.

Her other renderings are not equally satisfying, though in one of them she seems to have caught a symbol of her own predicament—

Let the stern-hearted stoic run boldly on death!
 I—I weep and hope...

But the "wind's chill breath" bent and broke her all the same. She lives in literature as one of those little significant 'commas' or 'hyphens' we cannot do without, whose power of suggestion could be potent and immense!

Need for roots: only a tree that has driven deep roots into the soil could put forth ample foliage and yield abundant fruit. Toru's first years in India were years of estrangement between the family and the orthodox Hindu community. The large Dutt family was itself self-divided, and an apparently insurmountable barrier separated the main body and the Christian diversion. In France and England, Aru and Toru under the fostering care of their parents were able to live an isolated, but also a free life. "The free air of Europe, and the free life there, are things not to be had here", Toru wrote later, recalling her days in England, and added: "We cannot stir out from our garden without being stared at or having a sun-stroke." In England, the nameless pressure of the ancestral place was withdrawn, and the girls quickly matured in that atmosphere. The first fruits were the translations from the French. They were certainly done well, but then they were no more than

the school exercises of precocious girls with a touch of genius. The mind was no doubt engaged, and so was the heart, generally speaking; now and then, however, Toru came across a poem that she herself might have sung in the first instance,—and then was the translation most tremblingly articulate, as, for example, 'My Vocation' by Beranger—

A waif on this earth,
Sick, ugly and small,
Condemned from my birth
And rejected by all.
From my lips broke a cry,
Such as anguish may wring;
Sing, said God in reply,
Chant, poor little thing.

Suffering and the dark image of an incomprehensible fatality were Toru's shadow-companions, and one therefore feels that the following lines communicate as much the translator's sensibility as Victor Hugo's or Eugene Manuel's—

The tomb said to the Rose.—
Of the tears the night strows,
What makest thou, O flower of the dawning?
The Rose said to the tomb,—
Of what falls in thy womb,
What makest thou, O gulf ever yawning?
The Rose whispered—O tomb!
From these years shed in gloom
Is the scent famed in song and in story.
The tomb said—O my pet!
Of each soul that I get
I create a winged angel of glory...

In secret from among the throng
God sometimes takes a soul,
And leads her slow, through grief and wrong,
Unswerving to her goal...
Beneath a weight of pains and fears
He makes her often fall,
He nourishes her with bitter tears,
Unseen, unknown of all...
And when He sees her ever true,
Like needle to the pole,

Upon his work he smiles anew—
Thus forges God a soul.

Here and there in her renderings the metre undoubtedly limps a little; the right word sometimes eludes her, and even her grammar occasionally nods. But the total impression! French and English were alike 'foreign' to Toru,—yet she would attempt the impossible. And her achievement was little short of the miraculous, taking all circumstances into consideration. The romantic fervour, the feeling for freedom and melancholy, even the magic are caught and communicated in substantial measure. No wonder Gosse declared, "if modern French literature were entirely lost, it might not be found impossible to reconstruct a great number of poems from this Indian version". But Toru herself was duly apologetic about her versions, and her maiden modesty and humility was not the least of her many graces. She concluded the *Sheaf* with a sonnet of her own, and this deserves to be given here in full—

'A mon Pere'

The flowers look loveliest in their native soil
And their kindred branches; plucked, they fade
And lose the colours Nature on them laid,
Though bound in garlands with assiduous toil.
Pleasant it was, afar from all turmoil
To wander through the valley, now in shade
And now in sunshine, where these blossoms made
A Paradise, and gather in my spoil.
But better than myself no man can know
How tarnished have become their tender hues
E'en in the gathering, and how dimmed their glow!
Wouldst thou again new life in them infuse,
Thou who hast seen them where they brightly blow?
Ask Memory. She shall help my stammering Muse.

Extraordinary, no doubt, but Toru's feeling for French seems indeed to have been as sensitive as her feeling for English, and when her French novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, was published posthumously, one critic said: "This one surpasses all the prodigies. She is a Frenchwoman in this book, and a Frenchwoman like ourselves; she thinks, she writes,

like one of us". What could Toru have known about the ardours or the agonies of love? Marguerite the heroine of the novel is torn between Louis and Count Dunois. She loves the latter, who loves the maid Jeanette, and kills his own brother Gaston on account of jealousy, and later kills himself. After a long illness, Marguerite marries the worthy Louis, and she becomes a mother and dies. Upto a point, Marguerite is Toru's self-portrait—a veiled picture of her imaginative life. The Bianca story in English is no less suggestive. Bianca's elder sister, Inez, is just dead, and Bianca with her father attends the burial; Bianca's own illness follows. Bianca is torn between her dead sister's fiancé and a Lord Moore, both of whom wish to marry her, and the story breaks off suddenly. Immature certainly, but Bianca too is some sort of dream projection of Toru herself. Marguerite the French maiden and Bianca the Spanish maiden are but abstractions; Toru their creator is the only reality. Thank God, however, that the psychologists, the literary detectives, and the psycho-analysts haven't turned their attention to poor Toru!

Aru and Toru were really too young, and died too early. It was when the family returned to Calcutta that the sisters were able to face their own world with some self-assurance and maturity of understanding. Complete poise and further growth in strength and security would have been theirs, but Aru's death was an immitigable blow to the surviving sister. She turned to Sanskrit—the mother of Muses, the deep springs of India's racial memory. Now Toru could feel her feet on hospitable soil, and satisfy the secret longings of her spirit for roots in the consciousness of the race. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Bhagavata* gave her woman's imagination free play, and she could re-enact the ancient stories of star-crossed men and women and deathless heroes and heroines. Her Christian faith doesn't conflict with her attraction or addiction to the "deep magics" of the Hindu epics, any more than a modern Greek poet's Christianity conflicts with his fascination for the Homeric myths. What a struggle—and what a victory—for Toru! She was an Indian poet writing in English,—she was 'autochthonous', she was one with India's woman singers, no mean company. No room now for

But in the heat and bustle of the world,
 'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,
 Must he still labour with a loving soul
 Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.

But such apology or comment is rare. Toru is mainly interested in the telling of the ancient tales. Savitri, making what would now be called a 'love marriage', and fighting with the power of her love Death himself, and getting the better of him too; Lakshman, most loyal of brothers, leaving Sita alone against his better judgement, because she wouldn't see reason, and so leaving her a prey to Ravana—a perfect Greek tragedy; Dhruva, denied a father's love because of a dominant step-mother, seeking the love of the Father of all the Worlds, and becoming the Pole Star for all devotees; Buttoo (otherwise known as Ekalavya), eager for apprenticeship in archery, rejected by Drona, yet learning all with the image of the Master before him, and not shrinking from giving away his thumb as teacher's fee (*guru-dakshina*) when the cruel demand is made; Sindhu, the only prop of an aged couple, killed inadvertently by the thoughtless sport of King Dasaratha, and by law of Karma the cause of Rama's banishment and Dasaratha's death; Prahlad the devotee of Vishnu and the demon Heeran Kashyapu's son, choosing God rather than Father and King, and demonstrating God's omnipresence and omnipotence—these are not mere tales, fertile inventions of the poets of old, but part of the consciousness of the Hindu race. From the nursery the children live with these heroes and heroines, and neither maturity nor sophistication does much to lessen the hold of these tales on our imaginations. It was thus with a very sure instinct that Toru sought in these deathless stories the right material for the expression of her own maturing poetic powers.

The Indian reader of these tales will either bring to them much of his own enthusiasm, born of long intimacy since childhood, and so read them as little masterpieces, or remember the nectarean Sanskrit originals, and feel disappointed at the inadequacy of the English versions. The question is, how will an English reader react to these tales? When she wrote them, Toru was already a good craftsman in verse, her feeling for words was impeccable, and her eye and ear were alike trained for

poetic description or dialogue. But these tales—some of them, at least—were more than mere poems of action or character—they trafficked with the supernatural. In the placid Sanskrit narrative, the appearance of a god or goddess is the normal thing. In an English poem, however, the words need wings of a sort to impose that willing suspension of disbelief—or even induce that momentary surge of belief—without which the poem would fail in its prime purpose. When Satyavan is dead and Savitri is holding anxious vigil by his side, Yama appears before her. Yama is the God of Death, but he is also the Lord of Dharma; he is the great upholder of Law, and not alone the Lord of the Kingdom of the Shadows. Here is Toru's description of Yama's approach—

She saw a stranger slowly glide
 Beneath the boughs that shrunk aghast.
 Upon his head he wore a crown
 That shimmered in the doubtful light;
 His vestment scarlet reached low down,
 His waist, a golden girdle dight.
 His skin was dark as bronze; his face
 Irradiate, and yet severe;
 His eyes had much of love and grace,
 But glowed so bright, they filled with fear.

Compare this description with Romesh Chunder Dutt's—

In the bosom of the shadows rose a Vision dark and dread,
 Shape of gloom in inky garment and a crown was on his head,
 Gleaming Form of sable splendour, blood-red was his
 sparkling eye,
 And a fatal noose he carried, grim and godlike, dark and
 high!

It is clear Toru's good sense succeeds where Romesh Chunder's careful art fails: Toru's Yama is both Death and Dharma, Romesh Chunder's is only the Dark God. For another example, here is Toru's description of Uma the Goddess as she presents her arm to the pedlar of shell-bracelets—

She stretched her hand,
 "Oh what a nice and lovely fit!

No fairer hand, in all the land,
And lo! the bracelet matches it."

Dazzled the pedlar on her gazed
Till came the shadow of a fear,
While she the bracelet arm upraised
Against the sun to view more clear.
Oh she was lovely, but her look
Had something of a high command
That filled with awe ...

Not weak she seemed, nor delicate,
Strong was each limb of flexile grace,
And full the bust; the mien elate,
Like hers, the goddess of the chase
On Latmos hill,—and oh, the face
Framed in its cloud of floating hair,
No painter's hand might hope to trace
The beauty and the glory there!
Well might the pedlar look with awe,
For though her eyes were soft, a ray
Lit them at times, which kings who saw
Would never dare to disobey.

A young and beautiful woman, yet a goddess too; without any selfconscious iteration or elaboration, Toru has convincingly limned Una's divine-human features. Yet, again, the scene in the *Bhagavata* where the Demon Father kicks the pillar and out comes the Lord as the Man-Lion (*Narasimha*) is a challenge to the poet, and this is how she meets it—

"I fear not fire, I fear not sword,
All dangers, father, I can dare;
Alone, I can confront a horde,
For oh! my God is everywhere!"
"What! everywhere? Then in this hall,
And in this crystal pillar bright?..."
"Yes, father, God is even here,
And if he choose this very hour
Can strike us dead, with ghastly fear,
And vindicate His name and power".

"Where is this God? Now let us see".
He spurned the pillar with his foot,
Down, down it tumbled, like a tree

Severed by axes from the root,
 And from within, with horrid clang
 That froze the blood in every vein,
 A stately sable warrior sprang,
 Like some phantasma of the brain.
 He had a lion head and eyes,
 A human body, feet and hands,
 Colossal,—such strange shapes arise
 In clouds, when Autumn rules the lands!
 He gave a shout;—the boldest quailed,
 Then struck the tyrant on the helm,
 And ripped him down...

It is difficult to give the mystic action of the *Bhagavata* a local habitation and name in English verse, but with the childhood faith of the pure eternal feminine, Toru has almost accomplished it. Sophistication would certainly have failed, but radiant simplicity has succeeded. Yet another difficult situation is the colloquy between Sita and Lakshman: Sita is foolish and cruel and perverse, but Lakshman is wise and gentle and understanding. Against his better judgement he leaves her alone in the forest—

He said, and straight his weapons took,
 His bow and arrows pointed keen,
 Kind,—nay, indulgent,—was his look,
 No trace of anger there was seen,
 Only a sorrow dark, that seemed
 To deepen his resolve to dare
 All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,
 As out he strode with dauntless air.

Toru scores again through the simple sufficiency of her clear understanding of the tragedy at the heart of this old world drama.

Since Toru thus succeeds so well on the heights, it is not at all surprising that on the slopes and the plain—description, narration, dialogue—she is no less successful. Description of the dawn of love as in—

And one among them tall and lithe
 Royal in port,—on whom the years,
 Consenting, shed a grace so blithe,

So frank and noble, that the eye
 Was loth to quit that sun-browned face;
 She looked and looked,—then gave a sigh,
 And slackened suddenly her pace.

What was the meaning—was it love?
 Love at first sight, as poets sing,
 Is then no fiction? Heaven above
 Is witness, that the heart its king
 Finds often like a lightning flash...;

description of Nature as in—

The champac, bok, and South-sea pine,
 The negessur with pendent flowers
 Like ear-rings,—and the forest vine
 That clinging over all, embowers,
 The sirish famed in Sanscrit song
 Which rural maidens love to wear,
 The peepul giant-like and strong,
 The bramble with its matted hair...
 A waving Pampas green and fair
 All glistening with the evening dew.
 How vivid was the breast-high grass!
 Here waved in patches, forest corn,—
 Here intervened a deep morass,—
 Here arid spots of verdure shorn
 Lay open,—rock or barren sand,—
 And here again the trees arose
 Thick clustering,—a glorious band
 Their tops still bright with sunset glows...;

quick dialogue as in—

"Is it a promise"? "Yes, I swear
 So long as I have breath and life
 To give thee all thou wilt". "Beware!
 Rash promise ever ends in strife".
 "Thou art my Master,—ask! oh ask!
 From thee my inspiration came,
 Thou canst not set too hard a task,
 Nor aught refuse I, free from blame"...;

Toru always rises to the occasion. Besides, her management of the versification is adroit enough—the 4-line ballad stanza, the

8-line octosyllabic stanza, blank verse, Toru is reasonably at home in them all. There are occasional unpleasant inversions ("Her heart-rose opened had at last") and wrenched accents, no doubt, but as a body of narrative poetry, the first eight 'ballads and legends' are unquestionably and movingly articulate, and disgrace neither the originals nor the language in which they are now rendered.

Of Toru's shorter lyrics, 'The Tree of Life' describes how an Angel, his face lit up with pity and love divine, once stood by the side of "a tree with spreading branches" and crowned her head with "a few small sprays"; this is the nearest to the recollection of a 'mystic' experience in Toru's poetry. On the other hand, the sonnet 'The Lotus' is 'fancy free' and exemplifies her delicate talent for building up a poem:

Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen.
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power
Had sung their claims. The rose can never tower
Like the pale lily with her Juno mien'—
'But is the lily lovelier?' Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.
'Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride'—
'But of what colour?' 'Rose-red', Love first chose,
Then prayed,—'No, lily-white,—or, both provide';
And Flora gave the Lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,
And 'lily-white', queenliest flower that blows.

Structurally a Petrarchan sonnet, it has an exquisite finish and a liveliness all its own.

'Sita' stands apart, however. It begins as nature description, but presently strikes the pure elegiac note—

Three happy children in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
And in its centre a cleared spot.—There bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake
The white swans glide; there, "whirring from the brake",

The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;
 There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
 There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light,
 There dwells in peace the poet-anchorite.
 But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
 She weeps,—for lo! at every tear she sheds
 Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
 And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
 It is an old, old story, and the lay
 Which has evoked sad Sita from the past
 Is by a mother sung... 'Tis hushed at last
 And melts the picture from their sight away,
 Yet shall they dream of it until the day!
 When shall those children by their mother's side
 Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

Valmiki's hermitage stands vivid before our eyes, but even more vivid and haunting is Sita in her sorrows, and the three children—Abju, Aru, Toru herself—weeping because Sita is weeping. This almost perfect poem is a tribute to Toru's mother's genius for story-telling, and the last two lines are a poignant elegy on the early death of Abju and Aru. Never had Toru written more feelingly or evoked a scene or an emotion as unforgettably. Once Toru wrote to her French friend Clarisse Bader—

Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita? I do not think so. When I hear my mother chant, in the evening, the old lays of our country, I almost always weep. The plaint of Sita, when, banished for the second time, she wanders alone in the vast forest, despair and horror filling her soul, is so pathetic that I believe there is no one who could hear it without shedding tears.

More recently, Rajaji too has commented on the Sita of the *Uttara Ramayana*: "The tenderness and purity and the untold sufferings of women took shape as the *Uttara Ramayana*. Like an unflickering lamp, it throws light on the quality of their hearts". Toru's little poem also is an "unflickering lamp", and throws light on the quality of her heart.

An even more impressive—though not more beautiful—poem is 'Our Casuarina Tree'. The sonnet 'Baugmaree' is splendid as an evocation of the trees in Toru's garden, and its close is truly memorable—

One might swoon
 Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
 On a primeval Eden, in amaze.

But 'Our Casuarina Tree' in more than the poetic evocation of a tree; it is recapturing the past, and immortalizing the moments of time so recaptured. The tree is both tree and symbol, and in it are implicated both time and eternity—

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
 The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
 Up to its very summit near the stars,
 A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
 No other tree could live. But gallantly
 The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
 In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
 And oft at nights the garden overflows
 With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
 Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
 Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest
 A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
 Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
 His puny offspring leap about the play;
 And far and near kokilas hail the day;
 And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
 And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
 By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
 The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
 Dear is the casuarina to my soul:
 Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
 O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
 For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!
 Blent with your images, it shall arise
 In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
 What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
 Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
 It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
 That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
 In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
 When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
 Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
 When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:
 And every time the music rose,—before
 Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
 Thy form, O Tree, as in my happier prime
 I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
 Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
 Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
 Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!
 Mayest thou be numbered when my days are done
 With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,
 Under whose awful branches lingered pale
 "Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
 And Time the shadow"; and though weak the verse
 That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
 May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

The first stanza is an objective description of the tree; the second relates the tree to Toru's own impressions of it at different times; the third links up the tree with Toru's memories of her lost brother and sister; the fourth humanizes the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and regret; and the last stanza wills as it were the immortality of the tree. The eleven-line stanza form with the rhyme scheme abba, cddc, eee is worthy of Keats himself. In the organization of the poem as a whole and in the finish of the individual stanzas, in its mastery of phrase and rhythm, in its music of sound and ideas, 'Our Casuarina Tree' is a superb piece of writing, and gives us a taste of what Toru might have done had not the race of her life been so quickly run. "There were few poetic glories", says Amaranatha Jha, "which, given maturity, she could not have achieved". But speculation and promise apart, Toru's actual record as a poet does compel recognition, and Mr. H. A. L. Fisher is no more than just when he writes: "... this child of the green valley of the Ganges has by sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets."

Romesh Chunder Dutt and Manmohan Ghose

To turn from Aru and Toru Dutt to Romesh Chunder Dutt is like passing from the bud and the flower to the ripened fruit; from Eratō and Melpomenē to Cliō and Calliopē; from Ushas, rosy-fingered and short-lived, to the toiling Sun on the ascendant; from infinite promise to impressive achievement.

Romesh Chunder Dutt was born in 1848, eight years before Toru Dutt his cousin (their grandfathers had been brothers), and died thirty-two years after her, in 1909. He was in London studying for the I.C.S. when Toru also was there with her parents and sister. Coming out successful in the examination in 1869, Romesh Chunder entered the Indian Civil Service, served in various capacities, retired in 1897, became President of the Indian National Congress in 1899, and later took office again as Dewan of Baroda. An able administrator, he found time also for scholarly undertakings; nor did he shun the ardours of literary creation in Bengali or in English. Michael Madhusudan and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had opened new avenues of development to Bengali literature, and Romesh Chunder too turned to creative writing. He was perhaps advised by Bankim Chandra to write his novels in Bengali, but he translated two of these into English (*The Lake of Palms*, 1902, and *The Slave-Girl of Agra*, 1909). Three of his novels, *Todar Mull*, *Sivaji* and *Pratap Singh* have been translated into English by his son, Ajoy Dutt. Besides, Romesh Chunder found time to canalize his massive scholarship and constructive patriotism into meritorious historical surveys—*A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, *Later Hindu Civilization*, *India in the Victorian Age*, *The Economic History of British India*, and *A Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal*. In addition to all these preoccupations, Romesh Chunder was almost possessed

by the desire to turn the art of translation into fruitful purpose, for the benefit of Bengali no less than of English readers. The publication of the Bengali translation of the *Rig Veda* was a notable achievement, and its merit was at once recognized. Even more creditable were his English verse renderings of India's great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and of selections from the *Rig Veda*, the Upanishads, Buddhist literature, Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* and Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniya*. These latter are included in *Lays of Ancient India* (1894), while his condensed versions of the two national epics were first issued in the Temple Classics in 1898-9, and added to the Everyman's Library in 1910.

Romesh Chunder's novels and historical surveys needn't detain us. The *Slave-Girl* takes us to the Mughal times and we have glimpses of life in 17th century Agra—love, intrigue, jealousy being the inevitable ingredients of this romance. *The Lake of Palms*, on the other hand, is a picture of Bengali life in the 19th century. The historical surveys are loaded with scholarship, and the patriot is revealed as much as the hard-headed historian.

It is, however, as the translator of Indian poetry into English verse that we are here specially interested in Romesh Chunder. He aimed high—the aim was indeed to render into English representative Sanskrit poetry, sacred as well as secular, from the *Rig Veda* to the later classical period of Kalidasa and his successors. The difficulties of verse translation are great in any case, and these become almost insuperable when the translation is from Sanskrit into English. Normally Sanskrit verse is unaccented; there are longs and shorts as in Greek or Latin, but the distinction between accented and unaccented syllables is practically meaningless in Sanskrit. Vedic poetry, of course, is often *sung*, the higher and lower pitches being unalterably fixed by long tradition, but this music too would be impossible to reproduce in English. If thus the music or rhythm defies translation, the meaning too raises difficulties of all kinds. How is the *Rig Veda* to be understood? As Nature poetry? As a body of ritual? As esoteric poetry trafficking in symbols? The translator has to decide for himself and then trim his sails accordingly. The Upanishads are, perhaps, easier to translate: yet the magic of the original can easily be staled in translation. The chime of repetition that acts as an incantation in the original can become mere affectation in English.

The two great epics—those long broad rivers carrying the purest clearest waters—challenge translation by their very simplicity of diction as also by their sheer massiveness. While the language is marked by a radiant and crystalline self-sufficiency and simplicity, the size of the poems is frightening to say the least. The *Ramayana* is made up of 24,000 slokas or couplets, the *Mahabharata* of 100,000 slokas. There are descriptions, elaborations, digressions; there are endless discussions and philosophical excursions; there are invocations, exhortations, admonitions, and whole manuals of conduct. As for the later 'literary epics',—those of Kalidasa and Bharavi, for example,—these are ornate and artificial, sometimes nobly beautiful with every rift being loaded with ore, sometimes strangely exotic and extravagant; and the translator finds himself in the narrows when he tries to turn this richly significant Sanskrit into modern English verse. A literal translation in prosaic prose may be attempted as a student's aid; but how is the verse translator to catch the nuances, the music, the overtones and undertones, the layers of suggestion, the tell-tale symbolism? Undaunted, however, by all these difficulties, Romesh Chunder took the plunge and with an almost routine efficiency turned out translation after translation.

The renderings in *Lays of Ancient India* are no more than just—but only just—competent. The sense is generally caught, and the metre seldom stumbles, though one is not always at ease when one reads the verses. Something is lacking surely—it could not be otherwise! The following stanzas addressed to Ushas the Dawn Goddess are admirable in their articulation—

Maiden of the morning sky,
Fling thy radiance far and nigh;
Bear us riches in thy arm,
Shield us from each earthly harm;
Speed our crops and corn and grain,
Every gift which men attain!

Damsel of the dawning light,
Fathers hailed thy radiance bright,
Raised their voices in thy praise,
Sang thy bounty in their lays;
We too chant thy deathless song,
And the ancient rites prolong!

The legend of Satyakama from the *Chhandogya Upanishad* is well rendered, and the conclusion transmits something of the thrill of the original—

And he came to sage Gautama
With a bright and beaming face,—
Sacred truth and holy wisdom
Bring its sadness and its grace.
'Lo! a light is on thy forehead.
Dost thou then of BRAHMA know?
Only those who know the True One
With such inward gladness glow!'

'Father, I have sought to fathom',—
Softly answered thus the youth,—
'From the objects of creation,
Not from man, the highest truth.
Boundless space and vault of azure,
Sky and earth and ocean broad,
Sun and moon and soul immortal,—
All is Brahma, all is God'.

And the painstaking versions of *Kumarasambhava* and *Kiratarjuniya* are, on the whole, a credit to the translator.

It is nevertheless as the translator of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that Romesh Chunder's fame must stand or fall. He was up against a truly Himalayan task, and he took two bold decisions. In the first place, he decided to reduce the 48,000 lines of the *Ramayana* and the 200,000 lines of the *Mahabharata* into 4000 lines each—or 8000 lines in all. The seven *kandas* of the *Ramayana* and the eighteen *parvas* of the *Mahabharata* became alike twelve Books. *Paradise Lost* had twelve Books,—and Romesh Chunder's versions of the two Indian epics too were divided into twelve Books each. Naturally, in order that they could thus be fitted into the Procrustes' Bed of twelve Books and 4000 lines each, many of the original descriptions and episodes had to go. The epic sweep is lost in consequence, and what we have is a series of extracts from the epic, but they are much less than, almost other than, the original epic. Representative bits of the elephant don't make the elephant, and these extracts too are not the epics. It is not as though Romesh Chunder has retold the old stories in his own way, though on a smaller scale; that

would have been a different matter altogether. He has been faithful to the originals after a fashion of his own,—but that is not enough. The splendour, the amplitude, and the vast epic comprehension of the original are damaged beyond recognition.

Romesh Chunder, again, thought that the metre adopted by Tennyson in his *Locksley Hall* is the ideal English equivalent to the *anushtup* metre of the Indian epics. Even apart from the supposed origin of the *anushtup* as the sudden crystallization of Valmiki's welling pity or *karuna* when he witnessed the killing of the *krouncha* bird and the distress of its mate, the *anushtup* has an easy disarming simplicity of gait and articulation which the long, often galloping lines of the *Locksley Hall* do not—and cannot—reproduce. Only too often do Romesh Chunder's couplets naturally divide up into quatrains with alternate rhymes—

Writhing in his pain and anguish
thus the wounded hermit cried,
And I drew the fatal arrow,
and the holy hermit died...

Bees are tempted by the honey
but from flower to flower they range,
False relations share our favour
but in secret seek a change...

And she bowed to him in silence,
sacred flowers beside him laid,
And her hands she folded meekly,
sweetly her obeisance made...

This is not very different from the metre used by Romesh Chunder himself for the Satyakama story—only now there is a clear pause instead of a new line with a capital letter!

It is true Romesh Chunder's two decisions—the drastic shortening of the poems and the adoption of the *Locksley Hall* metre, both questionable decisions—have none the less helped to introduce the epics to thousands of English readers who otherwise may not have heard of them. But the point has to be made that much has been lost in the process. The easy assurance and self-confidence of Romesh Chunder are admirable qualities: they have given his renderings an almost metallic clarity, an immediate

effectiveness. But the finer—the truly characteristic—things in the original, the reserves of *dhwani* or suggestion, the meandering opulence of description, the mounting dramatic crises, the primordial rhythm of calm following storm with a new storm anon brewing in the air, the sheer heights of striving, the abysmal depths of cruelty and suffering—these alas! we have to do without.

But within these limits, Romesh Chunder has done well, with almost the proverbial efficiency of the born administrator or executive. The Savitri story is well told—though it is odd that, pressed for space as he was, he should have found a place in his very much shortened *Mahabharata* for this episode. For the rest, the speeches are eloquent, the old similes come along in their majestic gait, and the descriptions really evoke places and scenes and persons. In his 'Epilogues', Romesh Chunder has many shrewd comments to make, and urges the important point that the *Ramayana* deals with idealized human characters, while the *Mahabharata* deals with human nature almost in the raw—

The characters of the *Mahabharata* are characters of flesh and blood, with the virtues and crimes of great actors in the historic world; the characters of the *Ramayana* are more often the ideals of manly devotion to truth, and of womanly faithfulness and love in domestic life.

In the *Ramayana*, there are three groups of characters, the human group, the *vanara* (monkey) group, and the *Rakshasa* (demon) group. In the human group, although the hunchback Manthara stirs up the stepmother Kaikeyi to experiment in evil-doing, the principal characters are all pure gold. There is no shadow of rivalry between the brothers—they are bound by an affection that is more than human. Sita exhibits human frailty once or twice, but is essentially a noble character, long suffering, truly Mother Earth's immaculate daughter. It is far otherwise with the other two groups—Sugriva supplants his elder brother Vali, and Vibhishan ultimately ascends Ravana's throne. The war in the *Ramayana* is exciting, destruction goes on at a maddening pace, but it is never harrowing, lacerating, and dehumanizing like the war in the *Mahabharata* which is really a *Seven against Thebes* or *King Lear* multiplied a thousand-fold. Brother against brother, fathers against sons, men against a woman, many against one, the living fury against the unborn—it is nightmarish, hellish, inhuman, and yet human because the characters are supposedly human beings

and often 'heroes' at that. And it is not a whit an old story with no contemporary relevance: actually, this sort of thing could happen today. Every modern war is a *Mahabharata* re-enacted with new names and in new places—Truth is its first casualty. The frenzy that shook India in the wake of the partition of 1947 is the same old story of maddened brothers butchering one another, with thousands of mute inglorious Droupadis suffering for sins not theirs. The *Ramayana* as an idealized picture and the *Mahabharata* as a brutally realistic picture are both perennial in their inspiration, perennial too in the warnings they utter and the hopes they induce even in the very midst of the carnage and wreckage they describe or anticipate.

In illustration of Romesh Chunder's clear-voiced rendering of the two epics, one long passage from each may be here cited with advantage. Hanuman after reaching Lanka and locating Sita in the Asoka Garden, wonders how he can make himself known to her. Finally he hits upon an interesting device—

Hanuman from leafy shelters lifts his voice in sacred song,
Till the tale of Rama's glory Lanka's woods and values prolong:

"Listen, Lady, to my story;—Dasaratha famed in war,
Rich in steeds and royal tuskera, armed men and battle car,
Ruled his realm in truth and virtue, in his bounty ever free,
Of the mighty race of Raghu mightiest king and monarch he,
Robed in every royal virtue, great in peace and battle brave,
Blest in bliss of grateful nations, blest in blessings which he
gave!

And his eldest-born and dearest, Rama soul of righteous might,
Shone, as mid the stars resplendent shines the radiant Lord
of Night,

True unto his sacred duty, true unto his kith and kin,
Friend of piety and virtue, punisher of crime and sin,

Loved in all his spacious empire, peopled mart and hermit's
den,

With a truer kindness Rama loved his subject men!

Dasaratha, promise-fettered, then his cruel mandate gave,
Rama with his wife and brother lived in woods and rocky cave,

And he slayed the deer of jungle and he slept in leafy shade.
Stern destroyer of the Rakshas in the pathless forests strayed,

Till the monarch of the Rakshas,—fraudful in his impious
 life,—
 Cheated Rama in the jungle, from his cottage stole his wife!
 Long lamenting lone and weary Rama wandered in the wood,
 Searched for Sita in the jungle where his humble cottage stood,
 Godavari's gloomy gorges, Krishna's dark and wooded shore,
 And the ravine, rock and valley, and the cloud-capped moun-
 tain hoar!

Then he met the sad Sugriva in wild Malya's dark retreat,
 Won for him his father's empire and his father's royal seat.
 Now Sugriva's countless forces wander far and wander near,
 In the search of stolen Sita still unto his Rama dear!
 I am henchman of Sugriva and the mighty sea have crost,
 In the quest of hidden Sita, Rama's consort loved and lost,
 And methinks that form of beauty, peerless shape of woman's
 grace,
 Is my Rama's dear-loved consort, Rama's dear-remembered
 face!"

This is a miniature *Ramayana*, and Valmiki says that as Sita listened to Hanuman, his words had the taste of nectar and poison at once.

The *Mahabharata* has scenes of naked ferocity—and sublime beauty also. The Karna story is, perhaps, the cruellest irony and tragedy in all literature. Kunti casts off her firstborn, Karna, for he has come prematurely into the world. He grows up among strangers, and is received and honoured by the Kurus. In the *Mahabharata* war, accordingly, Karna and Kunti's other sons—the Pandavas—fight on opposite sides. Too late, she tries to win over Karna to the Pandava side, but he will not abandon the Kurus.¹ Karna and Arjuna meet at last on the field of battle, and Arjuna kills Karna. Too late again, the Pandavas learn that in killing Karna they have killed their own eldest brother—

Hissing forth his sigh of anguish like a crushed and wounded
 snake,
 Sad Yudhishtir to his mother thus his inward feelings spake:
 "Didst thou, mother, bear the hero fathomless like ocean
 dread,
 Whose unfailing glistening arrows like its countless billows
 sped,

¹ This is the theme of Rabindranath Tagore's play, *Karna and Kunti*, discussed in the chapter on 'Tagore the Playwright'.

Didst thou bear that peerless archer all-resistless in his car,
Sweeping with the roar of ocean through the shattered ranks
of war?

Didst thou hide the mighty warrior, mortal man of heavenly
birth,
Crushing 'neath the arm of valour all his foemen on the
earth,

Didst thou hide the birth and lineage of that chief of deathful
ire,

As a man in folds of garments seeks to hide the flaming fire?

Arjun wielder of *Gandiva* was for us no truer stay
Than was Karna for the Kurus in the battle's dread array,
Monarchs matched not Karna's glory nor his deeds of valour
done,

Midst the mighty car-borne warriors mightiest warrior Karna
shone!

Woe to us! our eldest brother we have in battle slain,
And our nearest dearest elder fell upon the gory plain,
Not the death of Abhimanyu from the fair Subhadra torn,
Not the slaughter of the princes by the proud Draupadi borne,
Not the fall of friends and kinsmen and Panchala's mighty
host,

Like thy death afflicts my bosom, noble Karna loved and lost!
Monarch's empire, victor's glory, all the treasures earth can
yield,

Righteous bliss and heavenly gladness, harvest of the heavenly
field,

All that wish can shape and utter, all that nourish hope and
pride,

All were ours, O noble Karna, hadst thou rested by our side,
And this carnage of the Kurus these sad eyes had never seen,
Peace had graced our blessed empire, happy would the earth
have been!"

That is eloquent enough, and close enough, to the original, and one does get a taste of the strong *Mahabharata* vintage. Romesh Chunder was certainly an adroit versifier—although no poet—and since Valmiki or Vyasa is always behind the scenes to assist him, his condensed versions, notwithstanding their limitations, remain the best introductions in English verse to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The more recent abridged prose versions by Rajaji are in some respects more sensitive and rather closer to the originals, and may therefore be read also with pleasure and profit.

Manmohan Ghose, an elder brother of the more famous Aurobindo Ghose (now better known as Sri Aurobindo), was born on 19 January 1869, and died, not fifty-five yet, on 4 January 1924. Along with his brothers, Benoy Bhushan and Aurobindo, Manmohan was taken by his parents to England in 1879, and he had his early education at Manchester and London. During the later years of his stay in England, Manmohan like his brother Aurobindo had difficulties in making both ends meet, but when he won an open scholarship at Christ Church, he was after all able to finish his education at Oxford. English became almost a mother tongue to him, and the companionship of kindred souls fanned the poetic fire in him. With Laurence Binyon especially, Manmohan established an intimate and lifelong friendship. As Sri Aurobindo recalled years later, "Binyon and Manmohan had almost the relations of Wordsworth and Southey in the first days strongly admiring and stimulating each other". Long afterwards, Binyon was to recapitulate those early days in England:

I can still hear Manmohan Ghose standing up to read a poem in a crowded room. His long hair fell half over his eyes; as he read, he detached one of his dark locks and pulled at it with outstretched hand; oblivious of his surroundings, lost in the poem, he appeared almost convulsed in the emotional effort of his delivery.

Primavera, which came out in 1890, contained poems by Manmohan, as also by Binyon, Arthur Cripps and Stephen Phillips. Oscar Wilde, who reviewed the collection in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, not only thought that Manmohan lent some culture to Christ Church, but also—in a moment of divination—glimpsed from a great distance the future of Indo-British relations:

(Manmohan's) verses show us how quick and subtle are the intellectual sympathies of the Oriental mind and suggest how close is the bond of union that may some day bind India to us by other methods than those of commerce and military strength.

Wilde singled out for special praise the following—

Deep-shaded will I lie, and deeper yet
In night, where not a leaf its neighbour knows;
Forget the shining of the stars, forget
The vernal visitation of the rose;
And, far from all delights, prepare my heart's repose.

O crave not silence thou! too soon, too sure,
 Shall Autumn come, and through these branches weep;
 Some birds shall cease, and flowers no more endure;
 And thou beneath the mould unwilling creep,
 And silent soon shall be in that eternal sleep.

Green still it is, where that fairy goddess strays;
 Then follow, till around thee all be sere.
 Lose not a vision of her passing face;
 Nor miss the sound of her soft robes that here
 Sweep over the wet leaves of the fast-failing years—

and remarked: "The second line is very beautiful, and the whole shows culture and taste and feeling".

Unlike Aurobindo, Manmohan doesn't seem to have been attracted to politics, much less politics of the extreme variety. "I must leave my unhappy country to her own woes", he wrote to Binyon in 1887; "I shall bury myself in poetry, simply and solely". At one time Manmohan had hoped that he would be able to persuade his father to let him stay in England for good; "I am sure with the tastes I have, I shall be of no use in India". Nevertheless, he returned to India with a good Oxford degree, and after teaching for some time at the Patna College and serving as an Inspector of Schools (Shades of Matthew Arnold!), he became Professor of English at the Presidency College, Calcutta, retiring only in 1921. As Professor he was in the line of succession going back to Derozio himself, and Manmohan's pupils, reminiscing about his teaching, have called it "an act of re-creation"; and he "had direct access to the heart of things—so, in his classes, poetry did not remain a mere academic affair; it became a living reality".

Manmohan's life in India was clouded and darkened by the prolonged illness of his beloved wife. As a boy he had been denied the love and constant companionship of his mother, who came to be mentally deranged; "what to others is the bright portion of their life, its heaven and refuge", said Manmohan in a letter to Binyon, "was for me bitterly and hopelessly blighted". After his return to India, the further tragedy of his wife's chronic illness made a deep melancholy settle upon him, and he became a helpless prisoner of his own brooding sense of fatality. Manmohan also seems to have entertained,

at least in his years of adolescence and youth, certain complexes: for example, that there was something "repulsive" about himself, that perhaps he was less popular than his brothers! Surely this owed much only to his own imagination,—and certainly there was something of an elemental dignity and fortitude in the way he met his trials and afflictions. For years he was like a man doomed to witness a misery that he could do little to alleviate; his wife was stricken with paralysis, and all he could do was to watch and suffer silently. In the words of Binyon—

Day after day till the release of death, Manmohan's entire life was divided between his college lecture-room and the sick-room, where he devoted himself with unending patience to attending on the beloved sufferer. The prolonged nervous strain resulted in utter fatigue, utter despondency, and finally broke his health. The renunciation of all society prevented any compensating distractions.

No wonder that Manmohan, although he was in India, felt ill at ease with his surroundings; he was as one sternly isolated in a prison or hospital ward; he had to see things strangely, through a film of tears, and through coloured glasses as it were. He lived a life apart, building up a wall of reticence about him, but cultivating studiously the inner continents of his sensibility through sad and serious and sustained introspection. In course of time, the unendurable anguish of his wife's illness and death, his sense of increasing isolation in the land of his forefathers, and finally the breakdown in his own health and the premature onset of blindness made Manmohan "a broken man who bore the countenance of one tragically fated". His last years were thus a period of profound inner suffering, but out of that turbid tempestuous sea he churned out at last the nectar of the peace everlasting. We owe this vivid picture of the aged Manmohan to his daughter, Lotika Ghose:

For hours he would sit rapt in thought. The sunset deepened into darker shades, twilight crept on apace, but my father sat in the darkening room looking straight before him, sometimes repeating a few lines aloud, unconscious of all that was going on around him. Always there was the same intense look in his eyes, the same radiance lit his face. As I looked, it seemed to me that I was gazing on the face of some ancient Yogi on the eve of gaining the fruits of his Yoga.

The youthful poet described by his friend, the aged poet described by his daughter, it is the same man; it is the dreamer weaving fancies, it is the poet hidden in the light of thought, it is the Yogi trying to forge a harmony between inner and outer life, between here and eternity. The rising and the setting Sun, they aren't really different, although they seem to be; in my beginning is my end,—and in my end is my beginning! Manmohan died after a short illness, just before the date of his intended departure for England.

In his own lifetime, Manmohan published only a single collection of poems, *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898). But his muse was never idle. Like his brother who wrote a five-act play, *Perseus the Deliverer*, Manmohan too was attracted by the Greek myth of Perseus and started on an ambitious blank verse epic on the subject, completing the first six Books and leaving behind fragments of the rest. As if in reply to the criticism that Manmohan, having been too long in England and thereby become fully denationalised, could only write on Western themes, he attempted a long poetic play, *Nollo and Damayanti*, but left it also unfinished; and if, according to Binyon, Manmohan had plans to write a poem on the Savitri legend, he couldn't complete that either. The first world war must have made a profound impact on Manmohan (as the Civil War had on Milton), for he began an immense lyrical epic (in stanzas, not in blank verse), *Adam Alarmed in Paradise*, presumably on the lines of *The Dynasts* of Thomas Hardy. But his death a fortnight before he completed his fifty-fifth year left all these three stupendous efforts tantalisingly incomplete. It is, however, gratifying to know that, as part of the centenary celebrations, the University of Calcutta is taking steps to bring out Manmohan's Complete Works, including his letters and the literary remains.

Aside from his constant preoccupation with his *Nollo*, and the two epics, *Perseus* and *Adam*, Manmohan's lyrical genius threw out—perhaps as by-products of the main undertakings—a number of shorter poems, and a volume of these, *Songs of Life and Death*, was published posthumously in 1926 with Laurence Binyon's Introductory Memoir. Yeats greeted this volume as "one of the most lovely works in the world". It is not unlikely that some of the verses in this collection were

really meant to form part of the epic, *Adam Alarmed in Paradise*,—for example:

What voiced in landscape, God's vast peace
Just there, from depths of shade,
The woodland's dreamy heart profound,
'Adam!' it called and said:

'Creation's wonder and thy wife
Here selfed in landscape, see!
Soul of thy soul, thy fairer self,
Virgin I wait for thee'.

In the 1926, as in the 1898, volume—both collections of lyrics—the elegiac note—

The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue—

is the great bass in Manmohan's world of poesy. The impulse to love, the rebuff of fate—now the psychological action centered in his mother, now in his wife—this balance of forces is the real secret, the true motive force, behind Manmohan's elegiac poetry. But there was a third love too, an enveloping, a sustaining love; this was love of nature, love of collective Man, and here Manmohan met no rebuff, here he was duly recompensed. Nature is generally reassuring, it is even exhilarating sometimes; and yet there is need for communion with Man, for there is no substitute for human faces and human voices—even faces and voices in a crowded London street:

And a sense of vast sympathy my heart almost crazes,
The warmth of kindred hearts in thousands beating with mine.
Each fresh face, each figure, my spirit drinks like wine,—
Thousands endlessly passing. Violets, daisies,
What is your charm to the passionate charm of faces,
This ravishing reality, this earthliness divine?

Always, whether in his late lyrics or his earliest, Manmohan could give a technical finish to his verse. Here, in one of his earliest efforts perhaps, he is singing obviously for the sheer joy of singing:

Oh to be flowery,
 Dripping and balmy,
 Call up the showery
 White clouds, an army!
 Shallow and freshet flush
 Green as the grasses lush;
 By shady soft degrees
 Thicken the leafy trees
 To reach out dreamily
 Wall and lane over,
 Till in fresh groves are heard
 In the green clover,
 Warbling their lays each bird
 Over and over.

Coming to London, after a season in the country, he feels the suddenness and excitement of the change:

Farewell, sweetest country; out of my heart, you roses,
 Wayside roses, nodding, the slow traveller to keep.
 Too long have I drowsed alone in the meadows deep,
 Too long alone endured the silence Nature espouses.
 Oh, the rush, the rapture of life! throngs, lights, houses,
 This is London. I wake as a sentinel from sleep.

"This ravishing reality, this earthliness divine"; "Oh, the rush, the rapture of life!"; "This is London"—no sheer Wordsworthian Nature-worshipper this, for he likes the country, and he likes the city even more. But the same poet, like a Shelley or a Keats, can also solicit the pleasures of melancholy:

Willow sweet, willow sad, willow by the river,
 Taught by pensive love to droop, where ceaseless waters shiver,
 Teach me, steadfast sorrower, your mournful grace of graces,
 Weeping to make beautiful the silent water-places.

Nature might steal upon the poet with its opulence of life, colour and music, yet it cannot altogether blot out the sadness in his heart:

Over thy head, in joyful wanderings
 Through heaven's wide spaces, free,
 Birds fly with music in their wings,
 And from the blue rough sea

The fishes flash and leap;
 There is a life of loveliest things
 O'er thee so fast asleep.

In the deep West the heavens grow heavenlier
 Eve after eve; and still
 The glorious stars remember to appear;
 The roses on the hill
 Are fragrant as before;
 Only thy face of all that's dear
 I shall see nevermore.

George Santayana thinks that a reader of Manmohan's poems "would readily take them as the work of an English poet trained in the classical tradition"; and Amaranatha Jha goes even further and remarks that Manmohan's poems "give no indication of any characteristic, any imagery, any sentiments that can be said to be peculiarly Indian". All this is an oversimplification. The fact of the matter was that Manmohan, while in England, had deep nostalgic memories of India, and while in India, a similar longing for England; he had that supersensibility that made him, in G. T. Garratt's words, "an exile in England, and then doubly an exile in India". In his finely evocative poem 'Myvanwy', Manmohan wrote:

Lost is that country, and all but forgotten
 'Mid these chill breezes, yet still, oh, believe me,
 All her meridian suns and ardent summers
 Burn in my bosom.

If Manmohan's eye responds to the poplar, the beech, the butterfly, the thousand and one familiar sights and the procession of the English seasons, deeper still, aye deeper, childhood memories of India *burn in his bosom*, and they cannot be soothed away; and even when he seems to be describing English flowers and English trees, the poems are not divorced from his Indian origins, and do breathe *her* spirit of restrained rapture and tranquillity.

In his later, mature poetry—notably in the sequences entitled '*Immortal Love: Songs of the Triumph and Mystery of Beauty*' and '*Orphic Mysteries: Songs of the Pain, Passion and Mystery*'

Death is somehow exceeded, man dies and yet dies not, "for some ark that may survive the flood of things he fashions ... builds in the void future". Death is the end, and not the end; perhaps there is a further beyond still, and death is no more than a necessary knock to open the gateway to another world, another life: and Manmohan defies Death to do his worst:

Haste to kill,
Admit us to the brightness; people Heaven,
She dwells there where truth cores the universe.
'Tis everywhere. Behind the breeze it lies,
Behind the sunshine, to our thwarted eyes.
Eternal Love eclipses there thy curse
And joins all parted lovers ...

And so, in the end, Manmohan sees that pain can be exceeded and transcended, and he sends forth his soul's prayer for repair and recovery, for rebirth in everlasting day:

Paeon of Immortality,
O Godward peal of praise!
Ring, ring within my mortal ears,
My fainting spirit raise!

It may be that the lost joys of his life are "far sunk beyond rave and fret"; it may be that he is but surrounded by "the souls of dreams unflowered and the roses of regret"; it may be that he trembles and falters on the shores of desolation; but the "Godward peal of praise" could never be quite stilled, and he might hope to catch "the great rhythm that thunders up to bliss".

However rich his sensibility, however ennobling his thoughts, without technical mastery a poet must remain inarticulate. And his technical excellence is really Manmohan's immediately distinguishing mark as a poet. Sturge Moore has referred to Manmohan's "wonderful sense of the beauty of English words and rhythm", and Walter de la Mare to the "verbal music" or "the quality of sound underlying the words". Sri Aurobindo has indeed gone even further:

He was a conscientious artist of word and rhyme almost painfully careful about technique. Virgil wrote nine lines every day and

spent the whole morning rewriting and rerewriting them out of all recognition. Manmohan did better. He would write five or six half lines and quarter lines and spend the week filling them up. I remember the sacred wonder with which I regarded this process—something like this:

*The morn ... red ... sleepless eyes
... lilac ... rest*

Perhaps I exaggerate, but it was very much like that! That seemed to me to indicate an inspiration not very much on fire or in flood. But I suppose he became more fluent afterwards ...

Sri Aurobindo's opinion is based upon his knowledge of Manmohan's early work, and when he was asked to comment on his brother's movingly articulate sonnet on their mother—

Augustest! dearest! whom no thought can trace,
Name murmuring out of birth's infinity,
Mother! like heaven's great face is thy sweet face,
Stupendous with the mystery of me.
Eyes elder than light; cheek that no flower
Remembers; brow at which my infant care
Gazed weeping up and saw the skies enshower
With tender rain of vast mysterious hair!

Thou, at whose breast the sunbeams sucked, whose arm
Cradled the lisping ocean, art thou she,
Goddess! at whose dim heart the world's deep charm,
Tears, terrors, throbbing things were yet to be?
She, from whose tearing pangs in glory first
I and the infinite wide heavens burst?—

he made detailed illuminating comment:

Manmohan's poem has a considerable elevation of thought, diction and rhythm. It is certainly a fine production and, if all had been equal to the first three lines which are pure and perfect in inspiration, the sonnet might have stood among the finest things in the English language. But somehow it fails as a whole. The reason is that the intellectual mind took up the work of transcription ... The original afflatus continues to persist behind, but can no longer speak itself out in its native language ... A very fine poem all the same.

Manmohan's bigger efforts—the two epics and the poetic drama—were meant to overcome this tendency to work in the minia-

ture, not in the vast, this habit of acquiescence in the 'thinking poetic intellect', not the "spiritual seeing mind"; and, above all, to prove to himself as well as to others that he could also rise above the middle lyric flight and soar into the empyrean of epic and dramatic poetry. But he could complete neither of the epics, nor the drama either; perhaps death intervened too soon; perhaps, being the kind of man that he was, he couldn't have completed them even if he had lived longer—like Coleridge who couldn't complete his *Christabel*. Manmohan's genius worked best in the atomic scale, and he was thus able to make his short exquisitely chiselled lyrics the enduring monuments of those fleeting, if also poignant, moments of his outer and inner life. In his best work, the culture of Europe—and not alone the culture of modern England—and the intuitions and spiritual awareness of India met and fused into a harmony. He was as much at home with Theocritus, Meleager or Simonides as with Milton, Landor or Keats; he matched the rhythms of the English language with the distinctive tremors of his native Indian sensibility. He was in some respects the pure poet, and perhaps nothing became him so well as the poet in him. We can make a serious attempt to evaluate his full stature as a poet only when the still unpublished poems and all his letters are given to the world. But even already, he is—as Binyon affirms—"a voice among the great company of English singers; somewhat apart and solitary, with a difference in his note, but not an echo".

Romesh Chunder and Manmohan were Bengalees both, but literary activity was not confined to Bengal alone. People elsewhere in India, too, had received the blessings of the new education, and the results were not dissimilar. In Bombay, for example, there was Behramji Malabari (1853-1912), whose life, according to Sir Valentine Chirol, "was a long struggle to accomplish for himself, and to help his fellowmen to accomplish, the arduous task of reconciling Eastern with Western methods". Malabari was largely a self-made man. Born in Surat, he lost his parents early, and had to earn his livelihood by taking pupils in the mornings and evenings and, in between, receiving education himself at the Surat Mission School. Soon gravitating to Bombay from Surat, Malabari made a secure niche for him-

self in the social reform movement and in the history of Indian journalism. *The Indian Muse in English Garb* (1876) was a piecemeal verse autobiography, and was hailed at the time as "the first book of the first Parsi poet". He had a talent for satiric description as in these lines about two of his Surat teachers—

A man mysterious of the Magus tribe—
A close astrologer, and a splendid scribe—
A faithful oracle of dead Hormuzd's will—
A priest, a patriarch, and a man of skill ...

(and of another, who evidently inspired more fear than love)—

With pointed paws his fierce moustache he'd twirl,
And at his culprits the direst vengeance hurl;
Sharp went the whizzing whip, fast flew the cane,
And he fairly caper'd in his wrath insane.

This could be a variation of Goldsmith's 'village schoolmaster', and indeed he is (at least, used to be) a far-flung tribe. The volume seems to have been received well, Dr. John Wilson, for example, praising it for its "uncommonly intimate knowledge of the English language ... and fresh and felicitous expression".

Malabari's two prose works, *Gujarat and Gujaratis* (1882) and *The Indian Eye on English Life* (1893), showed how carefully he could observe men, whether in his own Gujarat or in England, and how vivid were his powers of description. Tolerant, with a gift for sympathetic understanding, Malabari made his characters and situations live before his reader's eyes. The Holi festival, the Marwari, the Aghori mendicant, the Vaishnava maharaj: 'dear old Bobby' the London policeman, the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau:—Malabari's evocation of all these is forceful and clear. Malabari had not been a journalist in vain, and his insatiable curiosity and broad sympathies helped to make him an engaging delineator of the human comedy. "No Indian journalist", wrote the *Times* of London reviewing his *Indian Eye*, "has done more than Malabari to maintain between the two races a feeling of friendliness based upon reciprocal respect".

Author, editor, publicist, social reformer, Malabari played with conspicuous ability the role of an Indian William Cobbett for a period of fifty years. He made his journals—the *Indian Patriot*, the *Voice of India*, and *East and West*—responsible vehicles of public protest, and he came to be regarded as one of the pillars of India's 'fourth estate'. So large a space he occupied in public estimation that in his day he was compared with Thackeray and Kipling! But Malabari himself was modest enough to write:

If I have, O God! my duty done,
What need for more? a tattered sheet
And—owing smallest debt to none—
An humble grave in length four feet
Obscure and nameless in some wild
Or at some mountain-foot be raised:
And in Thine honour be engraved
These three words only—God be praised!

Malabari's chief title to remembrance is his passion for reconciliation between East and West, which found its best expression in the journal with that title that he edited during the last decade of his life. He was also an indefatigable propagandist in favour of raising the 'age of consent' for marriage and of removing the disabilities of women in Indian society. "A wife at 10, a widow at 12, a mother at 13", he pointed out, were "monstrosities in the face of which it is madness to think of a consistent, progressive public life". He had a sensitive and active social conscience, and it was this that gave an edge to his writing and made him an effective moulder of public opinion.

Another, though less well-known, writer from Western India was Nagesh Wishwanath Pai, roughly contemporaneous with Malabari. Pai migrated to Bombay from the South, and made law his profession. His first book, *Stray Sketches in Chakmakpore* in prose, appeared in 1894. The thirty-six 'sketches' are, according to the author, "chiefly intended to amuse The main idea has been to give pictures of Indian life, pure and simple". *Stray Sketches* thus invites comparison with Malabari's *Gujarat and Gujaratis* and K. S. Venkataramani's *Paper Boats: Sketches of Indian Village Life* (1921). 'Chakmakpore' is, no doubt, Bombay towards the close of the nineteenth century, a

more leisurely and less congested city than it is today. But, of course, 'Chakmakpore' is also any Indian city, for the prototypes pictured in the book are really characteristic of India as a whole. Pai gathered his specimens for humorous dissection with a fairly wide net, and the old and the new, the traditional and the sophisticated, figure in these pages. The Parsee girl, the Medicoes, the Smart Student; the irritable Sahib, the Mother-in-law, the zealous Reformer; the Bairagee, the Mithai-wala, the Street Singer; even the Pariah dog, the bullock, the crow—all are here to give colour and variety to 'Chakmakpore'. As Pai presents Indian life from the inside, his portraits are not only vivid and arresting, they are also informed by understanding and lighted up by sympathy. It is to Pai's credit that he is not out to condemn or make out a case. He is content to describe his creatures and characters, having first seized them by direct vision. To the real humorist, everything is interesting and can therefore be made interesting to the reader; Pai scores because he is a humanist doubled with a humorist.

While humour is invaluable to the essayist, it can be fatal to the poet, and in writing his *The Angel of Misfortune* (1904), a narrative poem in about 5,000 lines, he is very well aware of this. The poet takes us back to one of the Heroic Ages of India, the times of King Vikramaditya. The 'Dark Angel' or the 'Angel of Misfortune' is Saturn or Sanīswara, who is determined to give Vikramaditya a bad time. King of Avanti and Ujjain, Vikrama has to surrender his crown to the Angel and live in disguise, leagues from his dominions. He is engaged as a servant by the rich jeweller, Motichand, but his trials are by no means over. For no fault of his, he is charged with the theft of Motichand's necklace, and Champa's ruler orders that Vikrama should be chained to the ground till he dies. An old widow, however, helps him in defiance of the King's orders, and even the King relents and permits Vikrama to live, though in chains still. He readily helps his benefactress by daily driving the ox round her oil-mill, and often sings while he is engaged in this task. On the day of Holi, Kamadeva's day, his singing is overheard by Indira, Champa's princess, and wins her love. In the end, all the tangles are straightened, and Vikrama regains his throne and marries Indira.

The 'fable' is interesting enough—not mere romantic tinsel but made up of elements garnered from the racial memory—and Pai's handling of character, his descriptions of nature and his mastery of the blank verse medium are all worthy of praise. It is not surprising that Pai's models are the Romantics, Keats especially, and Tennyson. Here is Pai's sensuous description of Indira as she moves from girlhood to adolescence:

And now the magic touch of youth has wrought
 A miracle of beauty in her form
 Making what was already lovely shine
 With added loveliness, each graceful curve
 And dimple look more 'witching than before,
 And what was soft seem softer, what was bright
 Grow brighter still. And as a tender bud,
 Kissed by the sun's warm beams as it expands,
 Unfolds its hidden wonders to the view;
 So, here, the ardent rays of youth's bright morn
 Disclose a hundred charms and graces all
 Unknown and unsuspected till they burst
 Upon the startled eye like poet's dream
 Or wondrous vision of the world to come.

She loses her heart to Vikrama even when he is in chains, and she doesn't know that he is Avanti's lawful King; and when Vikrama, now King indeed, makes his fervent protestations of love—

All trembling like a startled fawn now stands
 The gentle princess, whilst the youthful king
 In burning accents speaks the boundless love
 That fills his generous heart. She modest bends
 Her lovely head to hide the tell-tale blush
 That might betray the love she would conceal.
 Nor does she boldly raise her lustrous eyes
 To Vikrama's noble face, but shyly steals
 A side-glance, and as it meets by chance
 His ardent gaze, her eye-lids softly droop
 In sweet confusion.

Then at last she answers: "My lord!—My gracious lord! I am thine". Vikrama, Motichand, the old widow, and even some of the minor characters like Motichand's aged mother, these too are convincingly drawn.

Pai is no less successful in his descriptions of nature. Thus of a summer noonday:

Hushed is now
The mingled din of insect, bird and beast
That in the cool and freshening air of morn
Made vocal all the leafy wood around.

The coming of Spring (Wassanta) is compared to the "first hopes of youth", and this piece of verbal embroidery follows:

He seems at first to tread on tip-toe o'er
Tree, shrub, and creeping plant, as if he feared
To wake them from their wintry sleep ...
And then the delicate lilies on the lake
That revel in the sun's resplendent beams;
And tender *kumuda* flowers that coyly wait
The silver moonlight, and then softly ope
Their beauteous face, and smile upon the calm
And cloudless heavens; the overpowering breath
Of the bright golden *champah*, and the soft
But exquisite odour of the modest buds
Of *malati*; all, all are strangely sweet
And 'witching to the sense.

Here we have the quintessence of Indian romantic poetry, though expressed in the English language.

Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore is the most outstanding name in modern Bengali literature, and he was the one writer who first gained for modern India a place on the world literary scene. The award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to him was but the beginning of a drama of recognition on a global scale to which there cannot be many parallels in literary history. He was a great poet and a great man, and he has left behind him a great institution: the Visvabharati at Shantiniketan.

Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali, but had a mastery of English also. He translated many of his poems and plays into English, often changing, telescoping, transforming the originals. Occasionally he even wrote a poem in English in the first instance (for example, *The Child*). Besides, he lectured in English to audiences outside India or outside Bengal, and he also wrote many letters in English. Shall we, then, consider him only as a Bengali writer, or as an English writer as well? He belongs unquestionably to Bengali literature, but he belongs to Indo-Anglian literature too—indeed, he belongs to all India and the whole world. He was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer; he was a musician and a painter; he was an educationist, a practical idealist who turned his dreams into reality at Shantiniketan; he was a reformer, philosopher, prophet; he was a novelist and short-story writer, and a critic of life and literature; he even made occasional incursions into nationalist politics, although he was essentially an internationalist. He was thus many persons, he was a darling of versatility, and still he was the same man; he was an integral whole, the Rishi, the Gurudev. His fecundity and vitality were amazing. His active literary career extended over a period of 65 years. He wrote probably the largest number of lyrics ever attempted by any poet. He mused and wrote and travelled and talked untiringly. Next

only to Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, Tagore has been the supreme inspiration to millions in modern India.

Tagore's grandfather, Prince Dwaraknath, was a friend of Rammohan Roy. His father, Maharshi Debendranath, was the power behind the Brahmo Samaj in its palmy days. Such were the antecedents. The youngest of seven sons, Rabindranath was born on 6 May 1861, on the same day Motilal Nehru (Jawaharlal Nehru's father) was also born—a singular coincidence. Affluence and aristocratic culture surrounded him, and he grew up keenly alive and awake to the world around him. He had no regular schooling, nor did he go through the usual academic grind. He had, however, a profound regard for some of the Jesuit Fathers of the St. Xavier's College. Of one of them, Father DePereneda, Tagore wrote in his *Reminiscences*: "I felt in him the presence of a great soul, and even today the recollection of it seems to give me a passport into the silent seclusion of the temple of God". Rabindranath's forerunners—Madhusudan, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim—had given Bengali poetry, prose and fiction a great start among the modern Indian languages. It was an atmosphere of expectancy, and Rabindranath readily breathed this air of infinite possibility. At 15 or earlier he had begun writing, and by 1875 his first efforts in prose and verse had begun to appear in print. He was drawn to the Bengali Vaishnava singers, and indeed to Indian devotional poetry in general. A visit to England followed, and the English Romantics—Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth—and the great Victorians, Tennyson and Browning, exercised a potent influence on him; and he admired also Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Browne. Tagore was not a voracious or a systematic reader, but like Shakespeare, although he apparently read at random, he turned to capital use what had come his way. He lisped in numbers, and they came with astonishing facility. He had written about 7,000 lines of verse before he was eighteen!

In 1883, Tagore wrote a play which he later translated as *Sanyasi, or the Ascetic*. 'The Sea Waves' was written in 1887, after the boating tragedy that took a toll of several hundred pilgrims who were on their way to Puri. More poems and more plays—plays and play-acting and play-production—and restless activity on many fronts; and during the Partition of

Bengal agitation, he identified himself for a time with the movement and indited the celebrated poem, 'Rabindranath Salutes Aurobindo', when the latter, who was then editor of the *Bande-mataram*, was jailed and charged with sedition. However, Tagore was too much of an individualist—too much also of a humanist—to be a demagogue and court mere popularity. The satirical shafts in some of his plays and poems went home, and orthodoxy and parochialism trembled with rage. The nationalists were angry because he was not nationalist enough, and Government too was secretly suspicious of his moves and aims. He often retired to Shantiniketan, and lost himself in either the frenzy of literary creation or the tasks of education.

Shantiniketan as a home for retirement and meditation, an Ashram for cultural and spiritual realization, owed its origins to Tagore's father, the Maharshi. In course of time, Shantiniketan and the nearby Sriniketan became the focal centres of a new experiment in living. The cultures of the East were to be brought together, and a living relationship was to be attempted between the West and the East: the East was first to find its own soul, and then help the world to transmute the seeming West-East dichotomy into a creative unity and thus achieve a broad base for human understanding and purposive activity. Further, the cultural front was to be related to the life of the community, and education was to include vocational training as well. Above all, harmony was to be the keynote of all the activities in Shantiniketan and Sriniketan. These were the institutions that later grew to be the Visvabharati University. With an international team of dedicated scholars and artists, it made the valiant attempt to enact the drama of human unity and humane understanding. "We must recognize", Tagore once declared, "that it is providential that the West has come to India, and yet some one must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilization. India is no beggar to the West. And yet even though the West may think she is, I am not for thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association". This was the reason why he could not see eye to eye with the extremists who preached the gospels of 'Boycott' and 'Non-

cooperation'. When the political climate irked him, he returned to Shantiniketan and sought through the cultivation of solitude and Nature the innermost springs of spiritual life.

When Rabindranath was fifty, he had already a staggering output to his credit. He had made Bengali literature hum with excitement and exploration. He had thrilled people, he had taken them to the seventh heaven of felicity, but he had also shocked individuals and groups. He was the national poet of Bengal, admired by many almost on this side idolatry, but also castigated by quite a few rather vociferously; the 'masses', however, had 'accepted' him as a bard in the line of Chandidas, Vidyapati and Kabir. His Golden Jubilee was accordingly an occasion for universal rejoicing. A commemoration meeting was held in Calcutta on 28 January 1912, and it was clear the Bengali race as a whole had risen to do homage to him. It was truly an overwhelming experience for him, and it almost left him prostrate for a time.

As an escape from this exhaustion, Tagore started translating into English some of his own lyrics. Presently, while on his way to England, he returned to the translations again and again, and when he reached London he had a whole collection on hand. This bunch of prose translations soon came to the knowledge of Professor Rothenstein and later of W. B. Yeats, May Sinclair, C. F. Andrews, Henry Nevinston, and others, whose reactions were more than favourable—almost unbelievably enthusiastic. All this facilitated the publication of *Gitanjali* in 1912 with Yeats's memorable Introduction—

I have carried the manuscript of these translations with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants and I have often had to close it lest some stranger should see how much it moved me. These lyrics ... display in their thought a world I have dreamt of all my life long As the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand; and it has filled itself with the circumstances of their lives.

Tagore returned to India, to Shantiniketan—and there, in November 1913, he heard the news of the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to him. Henceforth he was not merely the poet of Bengal, but of all India.

The phenomenal success of *Gitanjali* emboldened Tagore and his English publishers, Messrs. Macmillan, to bring out other volumes of translations, either done by him or by others under his supervision, and even some original writing in English: poems, *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener*, *Fruit-Gathering*, *Lover's Gift*, *Crossing*, *The Fugitive and Other Poems*; plays, *Chitra*, *The Post Office*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Sacrifice and Other Plays*, *Red Oleanders*; *Stray Birds*, a collection of epigrams and aphorisms and poetic miniatures; fiction, *The Home and the World*, *The Wreck*, *Gora* (1923), *Hungry Stones*, *Mashi*, *Broken Ties*; philosophy, *Sadhana*, *Personality*, *Creative Unity*, *The Religion of Man*; autobiography, *Reminiscences* (1917). Tagore toured incessantly, and became a sort of unofficial ambassador, visiting the countries of the East and West, and by his speeches and even by his mere presence raising India's prestige abroad. He didn't involve himself too intimately with the political currents in India, but he maintained very friendly relations with Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. As the years passed, he became more and more a legendary figure; in his flowing beard and immaculate white robes he looked rather like a Rishi of Upanishadic times, and indeed he was truly in the line of the great Rishis bearing witness to the triune Reality, seeing the Way and showing it to others. He died, aged eighty, on 7 August 1941. In Dr. Edward Thompson's words, "Not a man only but an age had made its way at last into history . . . He had summed up in himself a whole age, in which India had moved into the modern world".

Bengali critics are agreed that Tagore is their greatest writer. Excepting that he wrote no single outstanding work with epic sweep and comprehension—a *Divina Commedia*, a *King Lear*, a *Paradise Lost*—Tagore's place is among the world's greatest. His work in English is mainly an introduction to his Bengali writings—it is both an invitation and a foretaste. But it has also its particular appeal. When he rendered his poems and plays into English, he often made drastic alterations, curtail-

ments, telescopings. Was it because he felt that the genius of the English language asked for greater restraint and compression? Or was it because the time lag between the original creations and the English translation effected a shift in his angle of vision? Both causes perhaps operated, thought in varying degrees. In any case, works like *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener* and *The Fugitive*, *Chitra*, *The Post Office* and *Sacrifice* compel laudation as English poetry and drama. When *Gitanjali* appeared, English and American critics were for the nonce carried off their feet; the poems seemed to waft them into the supernal realms of spiritual ecstasy, recalling almost the *Song of Songs*. But when volume after volume appeared, seemingly in an endless sequence, readers began to feel allergic to such dreaminess and mistiness, dissolving cadences and vanishing colours. This feeling deepened when the *Collected Poems and Plays* appeared in 1936, and one critic wrote: "Much of Tagore's writing is only a kind of mellifluous musing or is even lost, to quote his own words, 'in the endless mist of vague sweetness' . . . even his expression of ecstasy is apt to be diffuse, and this diffuseness is the more obvious when we have his work as here in bulk". There was the inevitable reaction. Almost thirty-five years have elapsed since the collected edition came out, and it should now be possible to read Tagore again and make a right appraisal of his work.

Tagore left behind him an immense mass of prose writing, in Bengali as well as in English. There are the novels, the short stories (of which some fifty or more are available in English), the lectures, the essays on a variety of subjects, the letters; there are also the plays, which are in a category apart. Even the most ethereal of poets cannot, after all, be always a poet, or a poet always at the top of his form; prose must come breaking in. Tagore knew this, and made this limitation itself into an engine of advantage. When he applied his mind to a current problem—social, political, economic—the heart ruled the head; and the heart, in its turn, beat in response to abiding intuitions, not the restrictive formulas of creed, caste or custom. The light of the soul's illumination led him, not the will-o'-the-wisp of agonizing dialectics. Whatever the problem, Tagore leapt from the circumference to the centre and

seized it in terms of universality. The poet sees clearer than others, further than others; and this he does even when he is apparently engaged only in prose composition. The novels and the short stories are among the most valuable by-products turned out by the great creative forge that was the *kavi* Rabindranath Tagore, but their source of origin unmistakably stamps them with their distinguishing quality.

Of Tagore's full-length novels, only three appeared in approved English versions in his own life-time. *Naukhadubi* (1905) appeared as *The Wreck*, *Gora* (1910) retained the same title in English also, and *Ghare Bhaire* (1916) became *The Home and the World*. *The Wreck* has an improbable start: two marriage parties are drowned in a boat-wreck, the only survivors being one of the bridegrooms and the 'other' bride. These two, Ramesh and Kamala, think that they are the recently married couple, and try to settle down somewhere. Ramesh realises the error sooner than Kamala, and so the inevitable complications follow. Kamala at last meets her real husband, Dr. Nalinaksha, and is accepted by him. And Ramesh is now free to marry Hemnalini. One may cavil at the improbabilities and coincidences, but the novel is packed with incident and character, and in spite of changing fashions the 'common reader' does like good characters and a happy ending. *The Wreck* has always been one of Tagore's popular novels.

Tagore's most ambitious work of fiction was undoubtedly *Gora*, written at the height of his powers with a view to projecting his vision of the individual's role in renascent India. It has been described by Krishna Kripalani as "the epic of India in transition at the most crucially intellectual period of its modern history . . . it is to Indian fiction what Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is to the Russian". And another critic, Sukumar Sen, says that the novel has been viewed "as something like a *Mahabharata* of modern India". Exaggerations, certainly, but there is also some truth behind them. The hero, Gora, grows up as an orthodox—almost as a fanatic—Hindu till he learns that he is but a foundling, his mother being Irish. During the Mutiny, she had taken refuge in a Hindu home in fear of the Sepoys; her husband had been killed the previous day; she had herself died, after giving birth to the child that grew up as

Gora under the care of his foster-parents, Krishnadayal and Anandamoyi. This 'secret' is kept up till almost the last pages of the novel, in this resembling the story of Tom Jones, another 'foundling'. The clash, on the one hand, between the old and the new, mere revivalism and blind iconoclasm, and, on the other, between 'progress' true and false,—the genuine humanism of the renaissance and the mere show of Western apéry—gives the necessary tension and edge to the novel. Debates fill the air, and people strike up strange or aggressive attitudes. The reader's interest is mainly divided between Gora and Sucharita, and Benoy and Lolita, and when in the end the *maya* lifts, the truth emerges from the fog of misunderstandings and the way is cleared for the two marriages. Gora, by losing all, gains all: "Today I am really an Indian", he declares; "In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussulman, and Christian. Today every caste is my caste, the food of all is my food". And he salutes his foster-mother, Anandamoyi, as the image of Mother India:

You have no caste, you make no distinctions, and have no hatred—you are the only image of our welfare.

Notwithstanding the wide canvas and moving multiplicity of character, incident and dialogue, the novel is a unity, and this comes from Gora himself, who is both the centre of the action and the circumference of the play of ideas. The rest serve largely to explain him, or are explained by his relations with him.

If 'love' is in conflict with religious 'orthodoxy' in *Gora*, it is in conflict with politics in *The Home and the World*. The action of this novel is set in the revolutionary Bengal of 1905, rent with the battle-cries of 'Swadeshi' and 'Bandemataram'. There are but three principal characters, Nikhil the idealistic husband, Bimal his wife, and Sandip his friend, and their autobiographical narratives intertwine to make the novel. Bimal, who has lived the sheltered life of a Hindu wife, suddenly hears the call of the outside world. She is thus caught between the pull of the 'home' and the pull of the 'world'. Nikhil is what is best in traditional India, and he refuses to believe that the *end* can justify the *means*. Sandip is typical of the new India

that would like to fashion itself in the image of the West, and the *end* is everything to him and any *means* are permissible to attain it. In the opening decade of the present century, the issue between the cult of humanism and the cult of the bomb was fought all over the country, and with particular acerbity in Bengal. *The Home and the World* is Tagore's artistic presentation of the impact of these forces on everyday life in an obscure Zemindari in Bengal. Of the three main characters, neither Nikhil nor Sandip changes much in the course of the novel; it is Bimal alone that changes under the stress of trial and error and failure. If Nikhil's is the *sattwik* nature, silent, long-suffering, reconciling, and Sandip's is the *rajasik* nature, voluble, impetuous, violent, then Bimal's is—to start with—the *tamasik* nature. She has to work out her salvation in diligence, through tribulation and experimentation and suffering and disaster; she has verily to go through fire and brimstone before she acquires the discrimination to see the difference between gold and tinsel, between Nikhil who has the innate strength to face a crisis and Sandip who takes to his heels the moment difficulties start. The cardinal issue, of course, is between God and Caesar, the ineffable realm of absolute values and the limited arena of political fireworks. Nationalism and patriotism alone are *not* enough. If bureaucratic tyranny roused Tagore, the tyranny of fanaticism—be it religious or political—moved him no less, and he raised his voice boldly against it. For Bimal (and for India too in so far as she is symbolized in Bimal), it is a double education, the moving towards the vortex that is the Sandip-brand of revolutionary action and the return to the old safe moorings, though now enriched and chastened by the experience of the 'world'. Of the minor characters, Nikhil's teacher connotes the strength of traditional wisdom, the Bara Rani signifies the obstinacy of tradition, and the boy Amulya is the image of youthful idealism—a glittering moth fatally attracted by the flame and destroyed by it. Perhaps, Krishna Kripalani is not wide of the mark when he remarks that the political message of *The Home and the World* is, as it were, an anticipation of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent political action, for the Mahatma too was to warn over and over again that "evil means must vitiate the end, however nobly conceived".

If Tagore, rather than Bankim Chandra, was the creator of

the modern novel in India, he was also the first to write true short stories in Bengali. His irresistible urge was to chronicle *chota pran, chota vyatha, chota chota duhkhakatha*—to tell the tales of obscure lives and humdrum trials and petty little miseries, to present the whole budget of Daridra Narayana's ills and strivings and failures, those yarns without a perceivable beginning or an apparent end. While novels like *Gora* and *Binodini* (the latter recently made available in an English translation by K. R. Kripalani) impress as much by their characterization as by their moral comprehension and the ethical seriousness of their plotting, the short stories are more immediately effective, trafficking as they do with the tears in things, the beauty that is sometimes refracted by the tears, the truth that defies the lie, or the sheer ecstasy of pain. Every short story needs must have a sort of structure: there are characters and incidents: there is a suggested tangle of relationships: and there is a conclusion that, so to say, stings and consoles at once. Yet a good short story is a living unity not by virtue of these factors alone—or these chiefly—but rather by virtue of the indwelling soul; in other words, the idea that inspires and sustains the story. With Tagore's short stories, the poetic flash is the main thing; it is the poet that sees the truth of things, the story-teller merely snapping the scene at the suggested angle. Quite unexpectedly the poet of Nature and humanity suddenly reveals his hand, our eyes open wide, and the pulses quicken as the heart beats faster. Thus in 'The Castaway', for example:

When with evening the child of want lies down, dirty and hungry, in his squalid home, and hears of prince and princess and fabled gold, then in the dark hovel with its dim flickering candle, his mind springs free from her bonds of poverty and misery, and walks in fresh beauty and glowing raiment, strong beyond all fear of hindrance, through the fairy realm where all is possible.

Even so, this drudge of wandering players fashioned himself and his world anew, as he moved in spirit amid his songs. The lapping water, rustling leaves, and calling birds; the goddess who had given shelter to him, the helpless, the God-forsaken; her gracious, lovely face, her exquisite arms with their shining bangles, her rosy feet as soft as flower-petals; all these by some magic became one with the music of his song. When the singing ended, the mirage faded...

An epic simile, though imbedded in a short story. Rather unique among Tagore's writings are those pieces of fiction (*Malancha*, *Chaturanga*, *Char Adhyay*) that are neither long enough to be novels nor short enough to be stories. *Char Adhyay* (1934) belongs to the last phase of Tagore's career, and he never wrote a more significant piece of prose fiction than this long short story in four chapters. It appeared in an English rendering in 1950, and what is remarkable about it is its contemporaneous quality. Returning after the lapse of eighteen years to the motif of *The Home and the World*, Tagore delivers in *Four Chapters* a further indictment on political fanaticism. Atin the hero tells the heroine Ela:

The patriotism of those who have no faith in that which is above patriotism is like a crocodile's back used as a ferry to cross the river. Meanness, unfaithfulness, mutual distrust, secret machination, plotting for leadership—sooner or later these drag them into the mud at bottom. That the life of the country can be saved by killing its soul, is the monstrously false doctrine that nationalists all over the world are bellowing forth stridently. My heart groans to give it effective contradiction...

But he cannot himself turn back; no easy way for him now, except to reap without wailing the fruits of his *karma*. Atin appositely quotes four lines from Ibsen's *Brand* and declines to play at self-deception. He is now great enough to face the truth:

I've slain my soul, the biggest sin of all ... Accept your hand? With this hand! But why all this? All stains will be washed away by the waters of Lethe, on whose brink we stand...

They are a trapped pair, these doomed lovers; but they do not wince. Nothing in their lives became them so well as their end. *Four Chapters* is, as Tagore has explained, a love story, though it has a political background. So is *Romeo and Juliet* a love story with family feud for its background. So is *Doctor Zhivago* a love story with the Soviet Revolution and Stalinist Reconstruction for its background. The strife is the dark, deafening Nay; the flaming love that defies death itself is the Everlasting Yea. *Four Chapters* was Tagore's great gesture of protest, but it is also a benediction, born of compassion and love. Tagore

seems to say in so many words: The end does *not* justify the means. The needs of the collectivity do *not* justify the suppression of the individual. Not only power corrupts, but the ways of achieving power also corrupt, and corrupt more and more. Politics and revolution are the commodities in Caesar's mart; but humanity, love and compassion are the gifts of God himself. Love is the great reality, for only love can defeat death. Like Yuri and Lara in *Doctor Zhivago*, Atin and Ela too but articulate the bitter-sweet Testament of Love. *Four Chapters* is Tagore's *Doctor Zhivago*—no more than a miniature, no more than a seed, yet the seed of a mighty banyan.

We need not be detained longer by Tagore's prose. Tagore was a poet—his poetry is the reality, his other writings are but the by-products. During the hours and days of intense experience of life's significances and essences, Tagore wrote poetry or poetic drama. Imagination gave him eyes, ears, wings, and a thrilling and melodious voice—and poems and plays flowed with a rapidity that was amazing. When the agitation ceased, when the emotional excitement calmed down, he commented on what had passed, he speculated, he generalized and he philosophized. But at unpredictable moments poetic iridescent flashes would brighten up even his prose. A character like Gora or the Cabuliwallah becomes more than a person, he becomes a poetic symbol, a modern myth opening up the windows of the spirit. There are also partial autobiographical emanations, like Nikhil of *The Home and the World*. Yes, indeed, Tagore's prose is worth reading for its own sake, but more particularly because it helps us to get closer to the creator of *Gitanjali* and *Chitra* and the other poems and plays.

The *Gitanjali* songs are mainly poems of *bhakti* in the great Indian tradition. We have Vaishnava poets and Saiva poets who seek God as a child seeks its mother, as a lover seeks his (or her) beloved. Numerous are these gifted singers—god-intoxicated, intoxicated with the love of the Divine, turning this love into the purest poetry. The current coin of India's devotional poetry is melted and minted anew by Rabindranath, but the pure gold shines as brightly as ever, even though the inscription on the coin is in English. The imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trial, the promise, the realization—

all have the quaintly unique Indian flavour and taste. Its familiarity was its recommendation to India; its apparent novelty was its recommendation abroad. It was anyhow poetry unmistakable. M. Abbe Bremond once declared that pure poetry aspires to a condition of prayer. Such poetry is half a prayer from below, half a whisper from above: the prayer evoking the response, or the whisper provoking the prayer, and always prayer and whisper chiming into song. *Gitanjali* is full of such poetry. Let us listen to the opening song—

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel
thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

The human body is the temple of the soul, the human soul is the temple of God. The human soul is nought unless it is inhabited or "filled" by the Spirit. Birth and death are but the filling and the emptying of the soul by the Spirit, and the individual—insignificant as he may seem to be—verily partakes of God's endless life, His immortality. Now for the second verse—

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and
hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

The lifeless flute comes to life when the Lord of Brindavan plays upon it—forever piping songs forever new. The human soul is, not only God's temple, it is also Krishna's flute. Life's vicissitudes are but new melodies played by the Lord. The poet therefore concludes—

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits
in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

The phenomenal world in which the individual plays his obscure part is really the *lila* or the drama of the Supreme, and to know this is to participate in the total joy of the cosmic play and give utterance to the joy in ineffable song. Even so is the seemingly little united with the vast, and frail man is filled with the joy, power and glory of the Infinite. Nay more: not only is realization

the source of song, but song can also be the delectable clue that guides the devotee along the labyrinthine ways of the world to the very threshold of Reality—

Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs. It was they who led me from door to door, and with them have I felt about me, searching and touching my world....

They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the country of pleasure and pain, and, at last, to what palace gate have they brought me in the evening at the end of my journey?

The last corner turned, the last vigil over, the devotee is seized with marvellous contentment; and so he will make a final offering of his riches to the Supreme—

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet ...

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.

The one hundred odd songs in *Gitanjali* form a mighty piece of prayer and pleading and exultation. Integral with the main musical theme, other notes too are occasionally heard. Idolatry and blind worship are castigated—

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

The tiller, the stone-breaker, the honest labourer working in the spirit of the *Gita* ideal "Yoga is skill in works",—God is with them too. The idea of "escape" from the world's demands is puerile and vain—

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Or, in Sri Aurobindo's words—

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sacred earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and breath.

If some people are blind and seek Him in the wrong places or in the wrong way, others are crushed by their own cowardice and dare not seize the freedom that would end their misery—

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.

Endless indeed is the waywardness of man, endless the varieties of human wretchedness; slavery and misery form numberless patterns, and faith from below and grace from above are needed to end them once and for all. In what is probably the most often quoted of the songs in *Gitanjali*, Tagore articulates a prayer for his country's redemption, and many are the schools in India today where it is recited by the boys at the beginning of each day's session—

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Of the later books, *The Crescent Moon* is the book for children—and those adults that haven't lost the child's capacity for

wonder and joy. Like Wordsworth, like Walter de la Mare, Tagore too found in children a mystic quality. He found in them beauty, innocence, humour, charity, and a kind of ancient wisdom—and these Tagore celebrated in song. Many of the ideas and images he probably actually overheard in nursery or field or garden or roadside, but the familiar is touched with beauty and turned into song. In 'The Beginning', the baby asks its mother: "Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?" What is the mother to say! Evade the question? Attempt a modern biological explanation? The mother answers as mothers in India have always answered such questions—

She answered, half crying, half laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast,—

You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling.

You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made and unmade you then . . .

When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance about it . . .

As I gaze on your face, mystery overwhelms me; you who belong to all have become mine.

For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of mine?

The mother—half crying, half laughing—like the rainbow forming on the horizon when it shines and rains at the same time—is the very picture of the blessed feminine, the symbol of the world's creatrix. Does the baby understand her mother? She understands the ache and the joy, the convulsive hug and the intense love. It is one of the finest poems Tagore ever wrote. In other poems Tagore explores the child's world of thought and feeling, often ruled by categorical imperatives other than those that rule ours. The child's sympathies are wider than ours; he can identify himself with the puppy and the parrot and tell the mother that, if they are not treated with affection, he will run away into the woods. The child's capacity for imaginative identification with a variety of persons is as extraordinary as his gift for generous understanding and ready forgiving. Again and again Tagore ridicules or lashes the adult way of viewing the

child's life and trying to control or stifle his free expression. The *Bhagavata* is full of examples of the boy Krishna exasperating his mother and all his elders. The predicament is indeed a perennial one. Tagore thus consoles the child in 'Defamation'—

For every little trifle they blame you, my child. They are ready to find fault for nothing.

You tore your clothes while playing—is that why they call you untidy?

O, fie! What would they call an autumn morning that smiles through its ragged clouds?

In another poem, 'Superior', Tagore makes a rather older child 'impeach' a mere baby to their mother—

Mother, your baby is silly! She is so absurdly childish!

She does not know the difference between the lights in the streets and the stars...

When I open a book before her and ask her to learn her a, b, c, she tears the leaves with her hands and roars for joy at nothing; this is your baby's way of doing her lesson ...

'Authorship' is a piquant piece of fancy. The father, who is an 'author', goes on scribbling; he is supposed to be writing 'books'. The child is, however, at a loss to know what it is all about—

What nice stories, mother, you can tell us! Why can't father write like that, I wonder!

Did he never hear from his own mother stories of giants and fairies and princesses?

Has he forgotten them all?

Father mooning for hours in his study, wasting sheets and sheets of paper writing prosy incomprehensible stories, is a puzzle to the child and even a challenge to her view of priorities. The child cannot help musing. What much ado about nothing! Fancy and fantasy mingle; humour shades off into mysticism, and a revelation comes through tears and laughter, defeat and triumph. In 'The Last Bargain', a child wins where the King with his power, the rich man with his money, and the fair maid with her beauty have all failed to "hire" the poet—

A child sat playing with shells.

He raised his head and seemed to know me, and said, 'I hire you with nothing'.

From thenceforward that bargain struck in child's play made me a free man.

Next only to *Gitanjali* perhaps, *The Gardener* is the richest of the collections that have appeared in English. It is in the main a feast of love poetry—with a human rather than a divine slant, though with a poet like Tagore the border-line between the two is apt to be tantalizingly indistinct. These are paradisaical in their purity and intensity and even sensuality, yet, paradoxically enough, recognizably this worldly. When Tagore strikes his lyre, vivid imagery breaks out into sudden life like sparks from the anvil—

"I run as a musk-deer runs in the shadow of the forest mad with his own perfume ..."

"The gleaming look from the dark came upon me like a breeze that sends a shiver through the rippling water and sweeps away to the shadowy shore ..."

"You blind me with the flashes of laughter to hide your tears ..."

"My love, once upon a time your poet launched a great epic in his mind.

Alas, I was not careful, and it struck your ringing anklets and came to grief.

It broke up into scraps of songs and lay scattered at your feet

"I plucked your flower, O world!

I pressed it to my heart and the thorn pricked.

When the day waned and it darkened, I found that the flower had faded, but the pain remained."

All the make-believe and love-play that lovers feed on, all the agony and hopelessness, all the ecstasy and fulfilment of lovers' lives, all is woven here into a garland of memorable song. The lover who is restless because her beloved calls with his flute, though he is far away, is left to cherish the mere breath that comes to her "whispering an impossible hope". Equally hopeless is the longing of the two birds—the caged tame bird

and the forest free bird. They meet at last, but vain is their longing—

Their love is intense with longing, but they never can fly wing to wing ...

They flutter their wings in yearning, and sing, 'Come closer, my love!'

The free bird cries, 'It cannot be, I fear the closed doors of the cage.'

The cage bird whispers, 'Alas, my wings are powerless and dead.'

Hopeless too, though with a touch of the sublime, is the little girl's love for the Prince who passes by her door. She will deck herself in her best and await him, although she knows he will not so much as even look at her. This agony and transcendent felicity of loving and giving must be its own reward—

I swept aside the veil from my face, I tore the ruby chain from my neck and flung it in his path ...

I know well he did not pick up my chain; I know it was crushed under his wheels leaving a red stain upon the dust, and no one knows what my gift was nor to whom.

But the young Prince did pass by our door, and I flung the jewel from my breast before his path.

Philosophy is occasionally blended with this riot of romance, and sense tries to negotiate a truce with sensibility. 'What if love doesn't last for ever? Impermanence is the badge of all terrestrial things. Beauty must fade to be born again, knowledge should defy conclusion—

All is done and finished in the eternal Heaven.

But earth's flowers of illusion are kept eternally fresh by death. Brother, let us keep that in mind and rejoice.

In the circus of phenomenal life there is no room really for pride or self-abasement, for "the simple blade of grass sits on the same carpet with the sunbeam and the stars of midnight". Even the inarticulate beast has an individuality as rich as man's and kin to his, a kinship dating back, perhaps, to paradisaical life in Eden—

Yet suddenly in some worldless music the dim memory wakes up and the beast gazes into the man's life with a tender trust, and the man looks down into its eyes with amused affection.

It seems that the two friends meet masked, and vaguely know each other through the disguise.

The Gardener thus almost brings us back to something of the primordial felicity of the Garden of Eden, and once this vision has come back to us and we are able to see things with a new rapture of recognition, we are not likely to reject the gift again.

Stray Birds is a collection of pointed, gem-like thoughts or musings, written probably in vague imitation of the Japanese *haiku* and *tanka*: *Lover's Gift*, *Crossing* and *The Fugitive and other Poems* also include some of Tagore's best lyrics. Occasionally there is a sharp political note as in—

"No, I will never be the leader, brothers, of this new age of new Bengal; I shall not trouble to light the lamp of culture for the benighted. If only I could be born, under the shady *asoka* groves, in some village of Brinda, where milk is churned by the maidens!"

Some of the pieces in *Crossing* seem to have as it were overflowed from the *Gitanjali* volume. But, of course, the greatest single poem of Tagore's, *Urvashi*, is included—alas! in a considerably curtailed version—in *The Fugitive* volume. There is a reference in one of the poems in *Lover's Gift* to "the dancer at the court of paradise, the desired of men, she who laughs and plucks the minds of the wise from their cold meditations and of fools from their emptiness..." The *Urvashi* myth is as old as the Rig Veda, and Brahmana, epic, purana, and writers like Kalidasa and Aurobindo have embellished it in a variety of ways. Tagore views *Urvashi* as the sheer woman—not child, nor mother, nor wife—but the beautiful woman who is goddess and seductress at once—

Woman you are, to ravish the soul of Paradise...

Like the dawn you are without veil, *Urvashi*, and without shame.

She carries nectar in one hand, and a chalice of poison in the other; she slumbered till day came, and then appeared in her

'awful fullness of bloom"; she is of all men adored, the ageless wonder—

When you dance before the gods, flinging orbits of novel rhythm into space, Urvashi, the earth shivers, leaf and grass, and autumn fields heave and sway; the sea surges into a frenzy of rhyming waves; the stars drop into the sky—beads from the chain that leaps till it breaks on your breast; and the blood dances in men's hearts in sudden turmoil ...

A little more of the sheer magic of the original is retained in the fuller rhythmic translation by Edward Thompson—

In the assembly of Gods, when thou dancest in ecstasy of joy,
O swaying wave, Urvashi,
The companies of billows in mid-ocean swell and dance, beat on beat;
In the crests of the corn the skirts of the earth tremble;
From thy necklace stars fall off in the sky;
Suddenly in the breast of man the heart forgets itself,
The blood dances! ...

Here in *Urvashi*, says Thompson, there is "a meeting of East and West indeed, a glorious tangle of Indian mythology, modern science, and legends of European romance". Had Tagore written this wonderful poem, *Urvashi*, and no other, he should still be counted among the world's great magicians of song.

The Child is unique among Tagore's poems because it was first written in English and later translated into Bengali as *Sishutirtha*. In July 1930, Tagore visited Germany and witnessed at Oberammergau the 'Passion Play' performed by the villagers once every ten years in fulfilment of an old vow. Earlier in the year, Mahatma Gandhi had made his celebrated 'march to Dandi', and this event and Christ's 'passion' coalesced in the poet's imagination, and he composed *The Child* in a fury of creative energy in the course of a single night. There is something of Ibsen's *Brand*, Maeterlinck's *The Sightless* and perhaps also something of Holderlin's *The Death of Empedocles* in Tagore's tremendous evocation of humanity caught in the Night, striving to transcend its burden of frustration and failure, breaking in the process—yet refusing to accept the defeat as final, persevering with the quest, still striving and still hoping 'that man

holds in himself the key to his own redemption, that one day the new-born, the divine-child, will annul the burden of the ages, and end once for all the dichotomy between the desire and the spasm, the impulse and the act, the leap forward and the glorious fulfilment. The poem is in ten sections, and the action pauses and heaves like the giant waves of the sea. A brief synopsis would be:

- I. The evocation of Night, a nightmarish vision of all our mangled yesterdays leading up to the present Inferno.
- II. The vision of the Man of Faith on the hill amid the snow-white silence.
- III. As the day dawns, the Man of Faith gives the call to the Pilgrimage.
- IV. The pilgrims gather from all quarters.
- V. The long journey begins.
- VI. Another night, when one of the pilgrims kills the Man of Faith as a False Prophet.
- VII. When the night ends, the pilgrims see their Victim, feel ashamed, and continue the journey.
- VIII. Led invisibly by their dead Leader, they march on even during the night.
- IX. They reach a hut, and the poet of the unknown shore sings: "Mother, open the gate"!
- X. The door opens, it is the sunrise of victory, and the Child on the mother's lap is revealed: "Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living"!

The criticism heard often enough against Tagore's poetry that its imagery is stately traditional, the expression mellifluously soft and the emotion but an endless mist of vague sweetness will be seen to lose much of its edge when one reads *The Child*, especially the evocation of the terrestrial Inferno at the beginning: "Blind Time gropes in a maze"; darkness stares "like the dead eye-sockets of a giant"; the shadows look immense "like the torn limbs of night." And there can be no doubt about the articulate energy of protest in these lines—

Underneath the noisy terror a stealthy hum creeps up like bubbling
volcanic mud,
a mixture of sinister whispers, rumours and slanders, and hisses
of derision.

The men gathered there are vague like torn pages of an epic.

Groping in groups or single, their torchlight tattoos, their faces in chequered lines, in patterns of frightfulness.

In visualising the martyrdom of the Man of Faith in *The Child*, did Tagore have a prophetic vision of Mahatma Gandhi's death at the hands of Godse 19 years later? Tagore was certainly thinking of the 'march to Dandi', and perhaps he had a premonition that the Mahatma might one day invite his own Gethsemane and Calvary. The last three sections of the poem are an anti-climax, and seem almost to blur the intention of the poet. Are we to look upon the Man of Faith as the martyred Messiah, or merely as the Forerunner—a sort of John the Baptist—pointing towards the Child in the hut, "the new-born, the ever-living"? The elegiac and prophetic character of *The Child* could be even better appreciated during the Gandhi Centenary year (1969) than when it was first written; and, certainly, as a blending of West and East, of impressionistic description and bold prophecy, *The Child* will always deserve a central place in the Tagore canon.

VII

Tagore the Playwright

It is said that Tagore wrote his first characteristic play, *Sanyasi* or *the Ascetic*, while holidaying at Karwar on the West Coast of India. There has been a long and fruitful dramatic tradition in India, and Tagore was familiar with it. He was a gifted actor himself, and he was eager to give a new tone to the Bengali stage. He admired Shakespeare, probably he admired Ibsen, probably also Maeterlinck; and he knew his Kalidasa very well. He would try his hand at drama like them—yet it could not be quite like them. He was a poet, he trafficked in imagery and symbolism, he invariably saw the universals behind the particulars. A play needs a plot, even as a house needs a firm structure. But how about a house that is no house, the shelter of a tree or a bush? How about the logic of dream sequences? How about floating clouds—they unaccountably come together, they assume the look of a camel or of a continent, then they scatter and dissolve and leave not a rack behind! A play doubtless needs a plot, characters, dialogue, sentiments: but if all were to become symbols, what then? There are the 'Nö' and Kabuki plays in Japan, which can seldom be studied as a Shakespearian play can be; but in their own way they are effective on the stage and cause a dull hammering in the mind long after one has left the stage. There are certain traditional national attitudes, there are unshakable obscure racial memories, there are quite a few perennially recurrent archetypal human patterns—and these are the stuff out of which the dramatist creates his dramas. Tagore could take many things for granted: for example, an intimate knowledge of our epics and our main cultural tradition generally. Certain attitudes, too, he could take for granted. Idolatry in India is as old as the hills, and condemnation of idolatry also is as old as the Buddha, if not even more ancient. Asceticism and the failure of asceticism, casteism and the exceeding of casteism, the spectacle of husband being

redeemed by wife or wife by husband, or both by children, fanaticism striving with tolerance, pettiness striving with magnanimity—all are old, old themes. Tagore could start the play, strike the opening chords, name the characters,—and memory and imagination would do the rest. Not the logic of careful plotting but the music of ideas and symbols is the 'soul' of this drama. Not the apparent meaning but its echoing cadence of suggestion—*dhwani*, as the Sanskrit rhetoricians called it; in other words, the richness of the undertones—is what matters, for this alone kindles the sluggish soul to a new awareness of life's "deep magics".

Sanyasi is a study of the failure of what Sri Aurobindo would call the 'Refusal of the Ascetic'. In the *Vishnupurana* we learn that Jada Bharata, although he readily gives up the cares and pomp of kingship and retires to the forest, is unable to resist the play of pity which presently flames up into immaculate love. The Sanyasi, by withdrawing from the world as he thinks, has merely developed a negative virtue. Salvation comes, however, not from negation, but from wise acceptance, purification, and inner transformation. When the Sanyasi boastfully declares—

The division of days and nights is not for me, nor that of months and years . . . I sit chanting the incantation of nothingness . . . I am free, I am the great solitary one—

he symbolizes non-engagement, and cares not for victory in battle. The first stir and rustle of actuality disturbs him not a little, though emphasis is still his line of defence—

The earth breathes hot sighs, and the whirling sands dance by. What sights of man have I seen! Can I ever again shrink back into the smallness of these creatures, and become one of them? No, I am free . . .

The girl Vasanti disturbs him even more, but at first he tries to be stern. "I have deserted both gods and men". She asks for bread, but in his obtuseness he gives her a stone instead! Yet the springs of humanity, not being dried up completely, assert themselves at last. There are vague stirrings within, Vasanti's little trusting hand seems to touch his soul "with the wand of the eternal", she is to him like the "moth of the daylight". Even

so he makes one more attempt to reject humanity and love; he blows furiously hot and icy cold; in panic he runs away from her. But wherever he may go, life and the claims of life and the lure of beauty and love pursue him. Another child meets him and completes the education Vasanti had begun. He decides he will break the staff of negation and lean on the tree of life—

Let my vows of Sanyasi go . . . Oh, the fool, who wanted to seek safety in swimming alone, and gave up the light of the sun and stars, to pick his way with his glow-worm's lamp! . . . I am free. I am free from the bodiless chain of the Nay . . . The finite is the true infinite, and love knows its truth. . .

In a sense it is too late, for Vasanti is dead; yet can the giver of new life to the Sanyasi be really dead? The Sanyasi has learned the lesson of love and life, and there is now no danger of his returning to the deserts of mere ascetic negation. Tagore himself, in his *Reminiscences*, has underlined the 'moral' of the play—

. . . the great is to be found in the small, the infinite within the bounds of form, and the eternal freedom of the soul in love . . . on the one side the wayfarers and villagers, content with their home-made triviality and unconscious of anything beyond; on the other the Sanyasi . . . When love bridged the gulf between the two, the seeming triviality of the finite and the seeming emptiness of the infinite alike disappeared.

The Sanyasi, trying to flee from illusion, had been trapped in a new illusion; he has awakened from that nightmare and gone through the baptism of regeneration as a human being, thanks to the chaste tears he has shed—

Oh my child, the sorrow of your little heart has filled, for ever, all the nights of my life with its sadness . . . your sobs that pursued me, when I fled away, have clung to my heart. I shall carry them to my death.

The Sanyasi is indeed redeemed. It is not life that is the enemy of man, but the wrong kind of egotistic possessiveness that debases and enslaves body, mind and soul. True love, far from binding, can emancipate and enlarge. Love is the Everlasting Yea that liberates, purifies and intensifies human understanding, and reveals infinity in a grain of sand, and heaven in a flower.

The King and the Queen and *Sacrifice* are the reverse and obverse of the same medal. The 'King' is spiritually and morally blind in the former play, the 'Queen' in the latter; and the blindness in either case is the result of their self-centredness, their inability to make love a wholesome force instead of contracting to mere self-love. Sumitra the 'Queen' in *The King and the Queen* will not consent to dwindle into mere mistress and wife, but is ready and eager to bear the responsibilities of a Queen, the patroness of her people. But Vikram is given to self-indulgence and sloth, he has made himself the monarch of a sensual heaven, and he will not worry about the condition of his people. His brahmin friend Devadatta tells him in vain about the plight of the masses. The country is governed by parasites (who also happen to be the Queen's relatives), and to try to change the system is to invite rebellion. When the testing time comes, Vikram merely says that he will offer the rebels "terms of peace" to purchase his own peace of mind! Sumitra cannot accept this humiliating position, and decides that she must herself fight the rebels, if necessary with help from her brother Kumarsen, Kashmir's King. The action of Sumitra is, perhaps, distantly paralleled by Nora (though for other reasons) walking out of her husband's house in Ibsen's play. Vikram at first merely blames Devadatta and Sumitra for waking up "the sleeping snake from its hole", and cannot even take Sumitra's decision seriously. But when he learns that she has gone indeed to seek Kashmir's help, the "insult" inflames him, he feeds on his frustration till it changes him into a monster. The force that had long dallied with thoughts of love is transformed into an irresistible engine of hate and destruction. In the interval between Acts I and II, we are to suppose that Vikram has both quelled the rebellion at home and thrust back the Kashmir forces. Kumarsen is in hiding, his uncle Chandrasen and aunt Revati are ready to seize his throne. But Vikram himself will not cry halt to the campaign. He is wedded to war and revenge, as he was once lost in thoughts of dalliance—

Revenge is stronger than the thin wine of love. Revenge is freedom,—
freedom from the coils of cloying sweetness.

He must seize alive Kumarsen and humble Sumitra to the dust.

He is deaf to reason and sane counsel, stone deaf to the appeal of pity. He refuses audience to Sumitra, although she owns she alone is to blame and begs that her brother and his country may be spared. Chandrasen and Revati come to 'sound' Vikram about their future: the former is circumspect, but the latter is an utter vulturess. Vikram is almost startled to see reflected in Revati an image of his own lust for revenge—

Oh, the red flame of hell-fire! The greed and hatred in a woman's heart! Did I catch a glimpse of my own face in her face, I wonder? . . . Have my lips grown as thin and curved at both ends as hers, like some murderer's knife? . . .

This is the dim beginning of a new reformation, but the resistance to good is still strong. Vikram wouldn't see Devadatta, as he wouldn't see Sumitra. The Chief of Trichur now comes and offers to Vikram his daughter Ila,—the Chief is the type that always worships the rising Sun! But pure-souled single-minded Ila loves Kumarsen, and asks Vikram to help her. He is touched; he tells Ila—

The withered branch cannot hope to blossom with borrowed flowers. Trust me. I am your friend. I will bring him to you.

He almost envies Kumarsen: "Homeless fugitive, you are more fortunate than I am. Woman's love, like heaven's watchful eyes, follows you wherever you go in this world, making your defeat a triumph and misfortune splendid, like summer clouds". He makes up his mind to receive Kumarsen 'with solemn rituals' when he surrenders (as he must), and to give Ila in marriage to him. The long expected carriage arrives, and Sumitra brings to him a covered tray containing her royal brother's severed head. The King is aghast, but another surprise awaits him, for Sumitra too falls and dies with the defiant words: "Sire, no longer your Queen; for merciful death has claimed me". This is the wreckage of all hopes and plans and vain ambitions. A final twist is given to the play when Ila bursts in crying: "King, I hear the bridal music. Where is my lover? I am ready". Vikram's monumental egotism has made him naked and powerless all round.

In the companion play, *Sacrifice*, (dedicated to "those heroes

who bravely stood for Peace when human sacrifice was claimed for the Goddess of War"), Gunavati the Queen can think only of the anticipated joys of motherhood. She sends "red bunches of hibiscus and beasts of sacrifice" to be offered to the dread Mother, Kali, and Raghupati the priest assures her that the sacrifice would please the goddess. The King himself, Govinda, comes to the temple, and so does Aparna, a beggar girl whose goat has been sacrificed and who is accordingly distraught. Govinda's eyes are opened, and he forbids forthwith all shedding of blood in the temple. Priest, courtier, soldier, Queen, all think that this forbidding of sacrifice is sacrilege, and are shocked, or are apprehensive, or openly defiant. The beasts of sacrifice sent by the Queen to make her a mother are to be turned back, too, and she is furious and resorts to desperate measures. Jaising, Raghupati's ward, admires the King and loves Aparna; but his loyalty to his master is no less strong, and he has a vague dread of the sanctions of religion. Whereas the General, Nārayan Rai, escapes from the developing predicament merely by surrendering his sword to the King, Jaising is caught deeper in the tangle of loyalties, he veers uncertainly between fanatic action and loving surrender, and flits to and fro in agonized indecision. Raghupati tempts him with sophistry—

Sin has no meaning in reality. To kill is but to kill,—it is neither sin nor anything else. Do you not know that the dust of this earth is made of countless killings? Old Time is ever writing the chronicle of the transient life of creatures in letters of blood . . .

Jaising is shaken to the depths. Is Kali no more than a blood-thirsty Fury? Doesn't She rather thirst for human love—

Is, then, love a falsehood and mercy a mockery, and the one thing true, from beginning of time, the lust for destruction? . . . You are playing with my heart, my Master . . .

But Raghupati's is the stronger will, and Jaising agrees to kill the King secretly—"Deeds are better", he says, "however cruel they may be, than the hell of thinking and doubting". There are other plottings also giving further sinister twists to the action. Prince

Nakshatra is moved by Raghupati to kill the King; the Queen, on the other hand, asks him to kill the boy Druva, "the darling of the King's heart". Blood-lust is in the air, and maddens most of the characters. Only the King is firm, and so is the girl Aparna. All the rest think or at least fear that the goddess demands some worthy sacrifice. If it is not the King, the boy Druva will do quite as well. The boy is trapped, he is to be 'sacrificed' before the King or his new General, Chandpal, is able to prevent it. As a matter of fact, they promptly arrest Nakshatra (who is banished) and Raghupati, who is also banished but is granted a day's grace. His hope that this one day will enable him to see the King's blood shed before Kali proves nought since Jaising, driven to desperation, only kills himself. Raghupati realises at last the vanity of priestly megalomania and the criminal folly of blood sacrifice. In a frenzy of disillusion he throws away the stone image—"Away with these our impotent dreams, that harden into stones, burdening our world"! Even Gunavati is redeemed, for the old Goddess is no more—"She has burst her cruel prison of stone, and come back to the woman's heart". Raghupati and Aparna—"thesis" and "antithesis"—are now brought together by their shared heritage of Jaising's love, and a new order begins.

As usual with Tagore, the English version of *Sacrifice* is less elaborate than the original Bengali, and gains in dramatic restraint and concentration. Tagore himself seems to have played the role of Raghupati, who in some respects recalls Polydaon in Sri Aurobindo's *Perseus the Deliverer*. The extirpation of an old ethic in favour of a humaner new ethic is the theme of both plays, and bloodthirsty Kali and Poseidon are exceeded by humaner divinities. The criticism may be advanced that most of these characters are shadowy, being vessels of ideas more than individualized human beings. But, then, Tagore's plays are engines of ideas, and men and women are caught just when they are possessed by, and have become the vehicles of, certain ideas. The humanity is not denied, neither is it altogether ignored or suppressed,—it is transcended by new forces that blaze for a while with destructive fury till a new calm descends again.

Gunavati is a good woman within limits, but frustration gives her life a wrong turn; she becomes morally blind, piles blunder upon blunder, and is partly instrumental in driving Jaising to

suicide. Moral insensitiveness, indifference to others' pain, assertion of one's own ego—these are at the root of folly, which is but another word for crime. In *Malini*, again, as in *Sacrifice*, a new ethic challenges an outmoded old ethic: beauty and revelation clash with fear and fanaticism, and once more it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury—but also signifying a good deal. Malini the King's daughter has Buddhist leanings, and her banishment is demanded by the Brahmins "frightened at her heresy". There is talk that the army will take the popular side. The Brahmins are collected in front of the palace, determined to be unyielding, when Malini herself appears. Most of them are dazzled by her beauty of holiness and are converted to the new faith and hail her as Goddess and Mother and the "divine soul of this world". Only Kemankar and Supriya stand apart, but the latter is not quite sure that what he has seen is mere illusion. But Kemankar's is the stronger will, he decides to leave the country and try to secure foreign aid to root out the Buddhist heresy, and asks Supriya to keep him informed of developments. Presently Supriya also is drawn to Malini, and he betrays Kemankar's secret to the King. Kemankar is captured, and the King is full of gratitude to Supriya. But Supriya, although he has done what he has done willingly, knows also that he has played the traitor. Malini sees his plight and makes the King agree to granting a reprieve to Kemankar. But Kemankar is like a "god defying his captivity", and only wants to see Supriya. The friends talk at cross purposes, and vain is Supriya's appeal to his former friend—

My friend, is not this world wide enough to hold men whose natures are widely different? Those countless stars of the sky, do they fight for the mastery of the One? Cannot faiths hold their separate lights in peace for the separate worlds of minds that need them?

Kemankar cannot see things that way, and feels that "all truths must be tested in death's court", embraces Supriya and in the act strikes him with his chains and kills him. But before the King can strike the murderer, Malini appeals again—"Father, forgive Kemankar"! Why does Malini plead for Kemankar? Readers and critics of the play are puzzled. Professor Mahalanobis (as quoted by Dr. Edward Thompson) sees some sort of conflict—

She is torn between two impulses—or perhaps an ideal and an impulse, the life preached by Gautama and the other life of love and friendship. Both were vague, I think. Was she in love with Supriya? Or was it Kemankar? Or was she in love with neither? I do not know; but you feel as if there were a deeper conflict.

For one thing, Malini makes her final appeal without a moment's hesitation. For another, she had even earlier secured a promise from the King that Kemankar would be pardoned. If one crime could be pardoned, so could another be. Malini is meant to be the new revelation—Forgive, whatever the crime! Killing doesn't mend anything. Let even the fanatic killer *not* die—let him too have a chance to repent and see things in a new way. Forgiving is an absolute action or nothing—it cannot be subjected to the hucksterings of the market-place, it cannot be half-hearted, calculating, or prudential. Malini is meant to throw this challenge at us, as the Buddha did, as Christ did. We may not be able to rise to her heights, but it is not necessary to drag her somehow to our level, and wonder whether she loves this or that man, and what kind of conflict she is caught in. Malini is indeed the new revelation, as in her own day in her own way Joan the Maid was in France. Malini no doubt questions Supriya about Kemankar, and later when she sees him in chains, admires his stern unbending mien. But always she is above them all. When Supriya tells her about his betrayal, all she says is—

Why did you forget yourself, Supriya? Why did fear overcome you? Have I not room enough in my house for him and his soldiers?

It is the house of love, infinite in dimension; reared on utter fearlessness; walled up by continual understanding and forgiving; canopied by compassion. She knows that she could have won the battle of love openly and effected a change of heart even in Kemankar. That is why she deplores Supriya's action. And she is just true to herself—she is just herself—when she asks the King to spare Kemankar in the end.

Like Malini, Srimati of *Natir Puja* and Prakriti of *Chandalika* are both moving essays on the blessed eternal feminine, and both plays testify to Tagore's attraction to Buddhism as an ethic and the Buddha as a spiritual power and personality. *Natir Puja* takes

us to King Ajatasatru's court: the old King, Bimbisara, and his younger son, Chitra, have 'retired' from the everyday cares of the world, and Queen Lokesvari has a grudge, as wife and as mother, against the Buddha—the wrecker of homes and family loyalties. However veiled, the issue in the play is between the temporal power, the King, and the spiritual power, the Buddha (as, for example, in Ibsen's *Emperor and Galilean*). With the bigger issue are involved the usual rivalries and egotisms of a Court also, and all are made to eddy round the personality of Srimati, the palace dancer, an obscure person in herself no doubt, but now the chosen engine of the Great Affirmation. In the climactic scene, Srimati dances before the *stupa* in a crescendo of ecstasy—casting away one by one the superfluities of jewel and raiment till she is pure and naked in her yellow nun's wrap alone—when the Guard strikes her dead at the King's command. There is transcendent victory for her in death, for now even Queen Lokesvari—even the adamant elder Princess, Ratnavali—is overcome at last, and mutters, touching martyred Srimati's feet:

I take refuge in the Buddha!

I take refuge in the Dhamma!

I take refuge in the Sangha.

In *Chandalika* (1933), the 'untouchable' girl, Prakriti, falls in sudden love with Ananda, the Buddha's 'youngest' and best-loved disciple, when he chances to meet her near a well. A few kind understanding words set aflame her self-respect, and she is now his slave, though he has gone far away. But Prakriti's love is a devouring fever of desire, and she persuades her mother to work the primordial earth spell on Ananda so that he may return and quench the raging fever. The spell drags Ananda with irresistible force to the Chandalika's hut, but it works at the same time a hideous change on his countenance, which is no more than the index of the destructive fury of the storm within his own heart and soul. Prakriti's final victory is also her supreme defeat, for although she has won and brought Ananda to her cottage door, she cannot bear the sight of his agonized face—not the face she has longed for, that face of beauty and holiness!—and she cries in despair and implores her mother again:

Mother, Mother, stop! Undo the spell now—at once—undo it! What have you done? What have you done? O wicked, wicked deed!—better have died. What a sight to see! Where is the light and radiance, the shining purity, the heavenly glow? How worn, how faded, has he come to my door! Bearing his self's defeat as a heavy burden, he comes with drooping head. . .¹

Ananda is released from the spell, the mother dies in expiation of the wrong she has tried to do, and Prakriti's spiritual rebirth is completed. In all three plays—*Malini*, *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika*—the stress is on the spiritual action in symbolic terms behind the physical action in human terms. Kemankar, Lokesvari and Ratnavali, and Prakriti and her mother, all feel the transforming power of the pure in heart and angelic in compassion—Malini, Srimati, Ananda. Fire purifies, water cleanses, air freshens: and this is no less true in the spiritual realm.

The Cycle of Spring ('Phalguni' in Bengali) is a long and rather tantalizing sort of play. The central idea is the "Disrobing of Winter"—

In the world-myth this song comes round in its turn. In the play of the seasons, each year, the mask of the Old Man, Winter, is pulled off, and the form of Spring is revealed in all its beauty. Thus we see that the old is ever new.

There are songs, dances, the play of ritual, the riot of buffoonery—but what we are meant to witness is the inevitable end of winter and the birth of spring. "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" asked Shelley. Isn't Spring nascent in Winter, coiled within it as it were? Objection has been taken to the disproportionately long Prelude. Of course, the spectre of age, decay and death has first to be rendered in vivid terms before it can be effectively exorcized away by the magic of Spring. The objection thus is not to the Prelude itself but rather to its length. Still there are many good things in the Prelude—beautiful images, pointed exchanges, perennial situations. The sight of the first gray hair on one's head has always caused a shudder. The consolations of philosophy can be no more than dead sea fruit, while poetry without actually trying to console may really heal the wounds of the heart. The main play has a few symbolic characters, including

¹ Translation by Marjorie Sykes.

the Blind Minstrel—physically blind, and therefore “he sees with his whole body and mind and soul”. When the dramatist enters into a truce with realism, fancy and imagination can take wings, the actual can shade off into the Empyrean, and movement, sound and symbol can waft us into delectable universes of meaning. All Nature is involved in the drama, for life undergoes the throes of rebirth. April (or Phalgun) “pulls hard”, “April pulls very hard”; Spring is striving to be born, though Winter is reluctant to leave. It seems to be a war of attrition, but by and by Winter is forced into a rearguard action, and presently he is nowhere to be found. Spring is the reality, lost Winter is only a dim memory. The Minstrel sings—

Victory to life, to joy, to love,
To eternal light.
The night shall wane, the darkness shall vanish,
Have faith, brave heart.

And the play concludes with the choral song of the Festival of Spring—

April is awake.
Life's shoreless sea
is heaving in the sun before you.
All the losses are lost,
and death is drowned in its waves . . .

When the play in its original Bengali version was first acted, the poet rendered the parts of both Chandra who typifies youth and life and the Blind Minstrel who is old and blind, yet, strangely enough, the prophet of life's renewal. One may quarrel with the play because it is a fantasy, but it is woven with ritual that is part of the popular culture of India. In the right background and with the right actors the whole fantasy must come to thrilling life and the seeming lie become the splendid truth.

Another unclassifiable play is *Red Oleanders* (1925). The English translation of the play is not included in the one volume *Collected Poems and Plays*. There is the inevitable King again, though there is here no Queen; but there are numerous functionaries like the Governor, Assistant Governor, Deputy Governor;

Doctor, Professor, Headman, Wrestler, etc. The King is frequently referred to with bated breath, but not seen: there is the Invisible Voice which is heard but the speaker is not seen—till the King appears at last and we know the Voice to be his. Like the King, the mysterious Ranjan is also frequently referred to as if he were the darling of romance and revolution, but not seen—till, when the King appears, Ranjan too appears, but already dead and stretched on the floor. The soul of the play, however, is the girl Nandini. Hers is the challenge of virgin beauty to the world of the male. The Professor rhapsodically says—

Shē has for her mantle the green joy of the earth. That is our Nandini. In this Yaksha Town there are governors, foremen, headmen, tunnel-diggers, scholars like myself; there are policemen, executioners, and undertakers,—altogether a beautiful assortment! Only *she* is out of element. Midst the clamour of the market place she is a tuned-up lyre . . .

Nandini, of course, has a host of worshippers—Kishor the digger boy, Bishu the maker of songs, even the Professor, the King himself perhaps, for the supposed strong King has murdered peace and must dream of Nandini's face and eyes and black hair. But what is the 'action' of the play? What is the 'net' that separates the King from his people? Who are these officers? What is Ranjan's crime that he is forbidden to enter, except on pain of death, the Yaksha Town? Does Ranjan love Nandini even as she loves him? The action is as terribly urgent and as exasperatingly confused as that of Kafka's novel, *The Castle*. The world is a prison, Denmark is a prison, all our Denmarks (including this Yaksha Town) are prisons with their governors, deputies and assistants; the people always try to storm the Bastille, and the King is sometimes brave enough to break through his own self-forged Bastille and burst into the open and pull down the flag which is the symbol of his own tyranny! Ranjan is dead, but his cause is taken up by others; the King is with Nandini, and so with the people; Nandini's marriage in the spirit to Ranjan as signified by the "red marriage tie"—Ranjan even in death grasping the bunch of red oleanders sent by Nandini—gives her the right to lead the fight till victory is won, and so she marches against the Governor's forces and is followed by King, Professor, Bishu, Phagu-

lal, and the rest. The play concludes with Bishu's song of autumn and fruitfulness—

Hark 'tis Autumn calling,—

Come, O come away!

The earth's mantle of dust is filled with ripe corn!

O the joy! the joy!

Another play with a political slant, *Mukta-Dhara* (1922), is sometimes referred to as Tagore's greatest play. The date is, perhaps, significant. Although Tagore did not share Gandhi's belief in the Spinning Wheel as the wonder solvent of India's economic maladies, he too instinctively shrank from machinery and gigantism. He saw that the machine was making terrible inroads into the human personality, and ruthless technological power frightened him. What is technology—when it is divorced from religion and even from humanity—except a throw-back on barbarism naked and unashamed, yet also a barbarism a million times more ruthless than the old barbarism of the jungle and the cave? In Satyavrata Mukerjea's words Tagore articulated in *Mukta-Dhara* "an eloquent protest against the onslaught of machinery on the ancient ramparts of man's individual freedom". At a time when steel plants and hydel schemes are being extolled as the New Temples of India's awakening nationhood, it would be a salutary experience to remember that, sometimes, human values are being sacrificed with cavalier indifference and indecent haste. 'Progress' could be a double-edged sword, and one feels like asking: What price this technological 'progress'? Uttarakut and Shivtarai symbolize the exploiter and the exploited, the arrogant in power and the brave in spirit. Dhananjaya the ascetic and Abhijit the Prince who becomes the vassal of man's immortal spirit give *Mukta-Dhara* its spiritual and symbolic overtones and undertones. The state-organized Worship of the Machine is thwarted by the princely martyr, and majestic *Mukta-Dhara* flows on as before. Although it is not heavily underlined, the meaning of the play is clear: Human values are paramount, and to ignore this truth is to canter towards self-destruction. Tagore never wrote a more powerful play, or one richer in suggestion, than *Mukta-Dhara*.

There are, then, the plays or playlets inspired by the *Mahabharata*. *Chitra* was the earliest, *Gandhari's Prayer* and *Karna and Kunti* came later. *Chitra* is a succinct Tagorean version of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*. In the course of a perceptive Introduction to an English version of *Sakuntala* Tagore wrote—

In truth there are two unions in *Sakuntala*; and the motif of the play is the progress from the earlier union of the first Act, with its earthly unstable beauty and romance, to the higher union in the heavenly hermitage of eternal bliss described in the last Act . . . translating the whole subject from one world to another—to elevate love from the sphere of physical beauty to the eternal heavens of moral beauty.

In Tagore's play, *Chitra* first appears as an Atalanta, but when she sees Arjuna the ascetic, the warrior becomes a woman. She must win his love, even on false pretences. The God of Love and the God of Spring give her celestial beauty for the space of one year. Arjuna forgets his vows and surrenders to love. But each loves alas! only the falsity in the other—or what has become false. *Chitra's* beauty is but borrowed beauty (and so indeed is all physical beauty, with us for a term, but one day sure to be withdrawn), and Arjuna's is a flawed ardour—ardour that has surged as a result of this unfair attack of falsity. Neither is inwardly happy: she is unhappy because he doesn't really love *her*, and he is unhappy, ill at ease, because he senses that there is something wrong somewhere—and he is, besides, secretly drawn to the *Chitra* of rumour, the arms-bearer, the scourge of her country's enemies. Yet in the end, when the truth is forced out, real love flares up from the ashes of the false love that has gone up in a blaze. Now love is born of deep understanding, agonies experienced and shared, and the vision of the forthcoming fruit of their past discarded selves. What the God of Spring prophesied comes true—

A time will come of itself when the heat-cloyed bloom of the body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee.

Chitra is the quintessence of romance. The speeches burn with passion, and light up the way from truth to illusion, and again the

arduous climb from illusion to truth. Arjuna says, vaguely glimpsing the truth but greatly confused still—

I never seem to know you right Illusion is the first appearance of Truth. She advances towards her lover in disguise. But a time comes when she throws off her ornaments and veils and stands clothed in naked dignity. I grope for that ultimate *you*, that bare simplicity of truth.

The truth is that Chitra is “no goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference”. She is a woman and a mother, and Arjuna is content; he says simply, “Beloved, my life is full!”

What do they know of the body that only the body know? And what do they know of the mind or the soul that haven't known or loved the body? Tagore was seized by this idea, and he incarnated in *Chitra* the evolution of human love from the physical to the spiritual. The supernatural machinery—Vasanta, Madana, and their ‘gifts’ to Chitra—is strictly superfluous to the play's inner causation. The whole point of the play in that youth itself (its freshness, strength and beauty) is a sudden spring-time miracle; it is suddenly there, and, later, it fades away, as suddenly, as unaccountably. It is “Nature's trick” to bring about certain results, but, then, man has learnt through the ages of his civilized existence to improve upon or to transcend this mere trick and make it the means of a more integral and durable union that may last a whole lifetime and beyond it too. Because men and women have evolved subtle methods of seduction, there is also the risk of greater disappointment, revulsion or disgust. What is easily won may be even more easily lost. Knowing full well that there is the longer surer way—the way of devotion, *tapasya*—Chitra chooses the quicker way of borrowed beauty to make the assault on Arjuna's senses, rather than achieve the conquest of the whole man. Arjuna too is likewise ready, although he knows nothing about her except that she is physically alluring, to give up his ‘vow’ and surrender to the moment. No wonder she is inly discontented, and soon *he* is discontented as well. It is natural enough that beauty or glamour should *attract* in the first instance man to woman, or woman to man; but this ‘attraction’ has still to pass

other tests before it can acquire the name and true nature of love. With man and woman the attraction, the coming together, is not the end, but only the beginning. It has to survive shared trials, shared sorrows, the shared gradual failure of the bodily functions, culminating in a shared old age. Hence the 'impediments' that religion, ethics, custom and worldly wisdom raise between the first fine rapture and the sanctified final acceptance in marriage. The union of man and woman is the marriage of true minds, a whole spectrum ranging from the sensual to the spiritual. It is not to be got simply, or purchased, but to be striven for through *tapasya*, to be won and continually deserved as mutual self-giving at all levels of experience. Youth and beauty are transient, and death is unavoidable; yet marriage achieves the miracle of 'beyonding' youth and beauty; and motherhood and fatherhood too achieve the miracle of continuity, the 'beyonding' of death itself. Before the gods (or, simply, before the glow of youth and the ardour of love) deck her with captivating grace, Chitra is but a plain unselfconscious girl wearing a boy's attire. When the borrowed grace has been shed, Chitra is still beautiful because she has *known* love, because she is now a prospective mother. Beauty and youth, although they may be transient, are yet a part of our experience. Wisdom lies in neither looking upon the body and its beauty as ends in themselves nor in imagining that our life could be wholly separated from the physical base. Tagore rejected both 'negations'—the ascetic's denial of life as well as the sensualist's denial of the spirit. The blinding maddening ecstasy of the physical union is not denied in *Chitra*, but its transience is also recognised. Even as illusion is but "the first appearance of Truth", the fever and the throb of the senses are but a prelude to the less evanescent, more subdued, joy of 'holy wedded love'.

Gandhari's Prayer is a study of a mother and her son, the great and magnanimous mother of the Kurus and her eldest ill-fated son, Duryodhana. Both Dhritarashtra the father and Gandhari the mother know that Duryodhana is wrong; but the father compromises, while Gandhari will not. She is a great character. She has a clear vision of the doom to come and she speaks as the Mother of Sorrows—

Woman, bow your head down to the dust! and as a sacrifice fling your heart under those wheels! Darkness will shroud the sky, earth will tremble, wailing will rend the air. Then comes the silent and cruel end—that terrible peace, that great forgetting, and awful extinction of hatred—the supreme deliverance rising from the fire of death.

In *Karna and Kunti*, Tagore snaps another pair, another mother and another ill-fated son: Kunti the mother of the Pandavas and her eldest son, Karna, whom she had cast away as a first-born baby on the waters. It is a lacerating soul-searing scene. Kunti too is the Mother of Sorrows, she too is great because she has suffered as few have ever suffered, and Karna is great because fate has played with him and cast him for a cruelly difficult role. But now mother and son try to salvage what even at this late hour is possible from the general wreckage. Karna's concluding words show his humanity and magnanimity—

Mother, have no fear! I know for certain that victory awaits the Pandavas. Peaceful and still though this night be, my heart is full of the music of a hopeless venture and baffled end. Ask me not to leave those who are doomed to defeat. Let the Pandavas win the throne, since they must: I remain with the desperate and forlorn. On the night of my birth you left me naked and unnamed to disgrace: leave me once again without pity to the calm expectation of defeat and death!

In two of Tagore's dramas, the theme is man in relation to God, *The King of the Dark Chamber* (*Raja*, in the original, published in 1910) was the first of these attempts to invade the invisible. It was followed by *The Post Office* (*Dakghar*, 1912). These are symbolistic plays, no doubt, but even as human stories they produce, on our first contact with them, an overpowering effect on us. *The King of the Dark Chamber* is tighter than the original and consequently more effective. "Its theme is sombrely impressive", says Edward Thompson, "a magnificent attempt to dramatise the secret dealings of God with the human heart". There is speculation about the King all the time, and everyone in the play is involved in the tangle of thought, feeling and theorising. His Queen, Sudarshana, hasn't seen him; in fact, nobody has seen him! Surangama the Maid of Honour believes in the King's reality, although she too hasn't seen him. There is a false 'King', a Pretender, and even the Queen takes him to be

the real King. When the Pretender is exposed (or exposes himself), Sudarshana decides to end her shame by walking into the flames, but there, there in the Dark Room, she is safe! The King is with her, but the very memory of a mere instant's sight of him makes her shudder all over:

Terrible,—oh, it was terrible! . . . the blaze of the fire fell on your features—you looked like the awful night when a comet swings fearfully into our ken—oh, then I closed my eyes—I could not look on you any more. Black as the threatening storm-cloud, black as the shoreless sea with the spectral red tint of twilight on its tumultuous waves!

The King reminds her gently: "Have I not told you before that one cannot bear my sight unless one is already prepared for me?" The 'whisky priest' in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* tries to describe the strange nature of God's love to the Lieutenant:

God is love. I don't say the heart doesn't feel a taste for it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint of ditch-water. We wouldn't recognize *that* love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us—God's love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn't it, and smashed open graves and set the dead walking in the dark. Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.

So it is with Sudarshana, she flees to her father's place unable to bear the King's love. With Surangama sustaining her always, Sudarshana learns the hard way of suffering and surrender of herself, and is united with her King at last. Reason has received into itself the soul of faith and true devotion, Sudarshana has received into the Dark Chamber of her Heart the King of the Dark Chamber. There is no need any more for a blanket of darkness; they can go out together *into the light!*

What is this extraordinary play about? Quite obviously, the King symbolises God. He is everywhere, he is everything,—hence he is nowhere, and nobody, in particular. Each in his littleness or half-knowledge makes out what he can of him. Some deny his very existence. Some try to assume his name and usurp his functions. And some implicitly, blindly, accept him and are content. While the Queen has her doubts, the mere Maid

of Honour is securely stationed in faith. She *knows* that the King will not abandon his subjects, much less his Queen:

If he can leave us like that, then we have no need of him. Then he does not exist for us: then that dark chamber is totally empty and void—no *vina* ever breathed its music there—none called you or me in that chamber; then everything has been a delusion and an idle dream.

Since the drama is about the soul's adventures in its attempts to know God, many of the subsidiary symbols fall into their appropriate places to render intelligible the zig-zag progress of the soul towards the point of no return. Isn't the King himself verily the Hound of Heaven pursuing the errant soul till He has seized and redeemed it? Since the two main actors in the drama are the King and his Queen—God and the *Jiva*—the other characters should be seen as aids or impediments that help or hinder Sudarshana in her soul's quest for certainty. While Rohini is but a deceptive will-o'-the-wisp, Surangama is the psychic soul, the safety-valve behind Sudarshana's agitated and bewildered desire-soul. Grandfather who has lost his five children is the man of steady wisdom who has mastered his senses. Isn't the 'false' King the tinsel of glittering dogma and ritual? Aren't the Seven Kings but the blurred images of the rival faiths that exploit both dogma and ritual to stifle the free mind and heart of man? Indeed, the 'stage' where the action of the play unfolds itself is the mind and heart of man: the battles are fought in the theatre of the soul: and it is only when Sudarshana is willing to lose all—the last shred of her pride even—that she gains all, and is in a position to march out with the Master from the Dark into the Light.

While *The King of the Dark Chamber* is overpowering as drama and rewarding in its spiritual insights, *The Post Office* has a tighter structural unity and its meaning comes to us like a deep dream of peace. As a boy, Tagore had been too well looked after by servants, and this had irked him. It is said that he often had to spend hours in a room sitting near a window opening out into the garden and the pond. With all the imaginative fervour of a boy, young Rabindranath must have thirsted for the 'Great Beyond' as an escape from his cribbed

existence within the four walls of the room. But knock resolutely, and the door opens; call, and the response follows. As in the physical world 'action' and 'reaction' are equal and opposite, in the spiritual world too 'aspiration' and 'response' have a like causal relation.

A post office is opened in a little village. Amal the invalid child, who is ordered to remain within doors, has a limitless hunger for life, and the Post Office greatly exercises his imagination. He sits at the window and makes friends with the passers-by, imparting to each a new zest for life. Would the King send a letter to Amal? Could Amal become a postman and carry the King's message to one and all? There are only 2 Acts in *The Post Office*, and the movement in the second Act reverses, as in the hour-glass pattern, the movement in the first Act. Exposure near the window has worsened Amal's condition, and he is now advised to keep to his bed. Amal asks his friend, Gaffer, whether the King has sent the letter. Yes, says Gaffer, the letter has "already started". "I can feel him (the King's postman) coming nearer and my heart becomes glad", says Amal. Every word he speaks is simple—perfectly within the range of a child's natural vocabulary—yet also, in the context, charged with profound intimations. One by one the people Amal had talked to from the window the previous day now come into the room to meet him. Sudha the curd-seller is the last, and she places flowers in Amal's hands. And the curtain falls.

When Sudha asks, "When will he (Amal) awake?", the Physician answers: "Directly the King comes and calls him". Does it mean that Amal dies, and the King comes only to take him away? Is the King's Physician only the bringer of death? Or does it rather mean that the King would henceforth dwell in Amal's heart always—like what is comparable in the other King being forever reflected in Sudarshana's heart—and Amal would be (as he wanted to be) the King's postman wandering "far and wide, delivering his message from door to door"? Somewhat like the hero of T. F. Powys's *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* peddling the 'wine' of divine Grace among his customers! *The King of the Dark Chamber* is about a woman with a sick soul; *The Post Office* is about a child with a sick body. The King visits the Dark Chamber of the Queen's Heart, and all is well; the

King visits the sick chamber of the little boy, and all is well again. The physical death of Amal is thus not logically necessary to the story. On the other hand, it is more natural to assume that, as in the earlier play, in *The Post Office* too the adventure with the Divine leaves man cured in soul as well as body. Amal's aspiration and the Divine response meet, and the result is new birth, not physical death. The Divine has come to the parched human heart, and there will now ensue the burst of a new spring of life and joy.

But, after all, why must we bother about the precise meaning of this or that play? The meaning of a poetic play is no rocky substance. And we know that even a rock is but hard in appearance. Break the rock into atoms: and the atoms into the hundred or more sub-atomic particles that are gyrating wildly—and where are we? We have to grope towards a meaning, and even if we have only a tenuous something to hold on to, the adventure itself will not have been in vain. So it is with Tagore's plays.

VIII

Sri Aurobindo

There are people who read Sri Aurobindo (or about him) seeking an answer to the seeming riddle of his extraordinary career: there are many who see in him the promise of the Superman, the proponent of Integral Yoga, the prophet of the Life Divine: there are others who feel attracted to the patriot, the fiery evangelist of Nationalism: there are still others who are drawn to the teacher, the scholar, the interpreter of the Veda, the critic of life and literature: and there are many more to whom he is a man of letters in excelsis, a master of prose art, and a dramatist and poet of great power and versatility. It is the last-named aspect of a many-faceted achievement that is the subject of this and the two following talks.

Without question, Sri Aurobindo is the one uncontestably outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian literature. Tagore, no doubt, holds a comparable position in modern Bengali literature, though Indo-Anglian literature too can claim him as one of its own unique reflected glories. But Sri Aurobindo, in so far as he was a writer, was not merely a writer who happened to write in English but really an English writer—almost as much as, say, a George Moore, a Laurence Binyon or a W. B. Yeats. To acknowledge and salute the poet and the master of the ‘other harmony’ of prose is not, of course, to deny the teacher or the fighter or the patriot, the Yogi, the philosopher or the prophetic engineer of the Life Divine. But they are indeed all of a piece: or, rather, it is the same diamond—the Immortal Diamond—with different facets turned to our gaze at different times. Sri Aurobindo wrote once: “No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see”; all the same, some idea of his ‘life’ should precede any attempt at appraising his work as a writer.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872. His father, Krishnadhan Ghose, was a popular civil surgeon, while

his mother. Swarnalata Devi, was a daughter of Rishi Rajnarain Bose, one of the great men of the Indian renaissance in the nineteenth century who embodied the new composite culture of the country that was at once Vedantic, Islamic and European. On the other hand, Krishnadhan had a pronounced partiality for the Western way of life. Having himself had his medical education at Aberdeen, he desired that his children should, if possible, go one better even and be wholly insulated from the contamination of Indian ways. Strange, indeed, are the ironies of parental predilections! If Krishnadhan had sent his son, not to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling and thence to Manchester, London (St. Paul's) and Cambridge (King's), but to 'native' schools and colleges at Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo might have early mastered his mother tongue, Bengali, and become in the fulness of time another Bankim Chandra or Rabindranath, wielding with suppleness, grace and power the most dynamic of modern Indian languages. But his translation to England in 1879 (along with his two elder brothers, Manmohan the future poet and Benoy Bhushan) and his stay there for a period of about fourteen years made English his mother tongue for all practical purposes, and he came to acquire a complete mastery over that difficult language as if verily born to that heritage. At Manchester, Sri Aurobindo was taught privately by the Rev. William H. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett who grounded him well in English, Latin, French, and history; at St. Paul's, Dr. Walker the High Master himself took a deep interest in Sri Aurobindo's education and pushed him rapidly in his Greek studies. It was a fruitful period, and Sri Aurobindo, besides securing the Butterworth Prize in Literature and the Bedford Prize in History, won a scholarship that enabled him to proceed to King's. At Cambridge he made a notable impression on Oscar Browning, passed the I.C.S. open competitive examination (although he couldn't finally join the Service), and secured a First in classical tripos at the end of his second year. To his proficiency in the classics and English was now added a growing acquaintance with German and Italian, and also some knowledge of Sanskrit and Bengali. He read widely, spoke often at the Majlis, and wrote poetry. He left England at last in February 1893, having received an appointment in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda.

Sri Aurobindo passed the next thirteen years at Baroda. He

was employed in various departments, but he finally gravitated towards the Baroda College. He taught French for a time, and ultimately became Professor of English and Vice-Principal. During these years Sri Aurobindo fast achieved the feat of re-nationalizing himself. His mind had returned from "Sicilian olive-groves" and "Athenian lanes" to the shores of the Ganges, to Saraswati's domains. He gained a deeper insight into Sanskrit and Bengali, and cultivated besides Marathi and Gujarati. He read with avidity, and he wrote copiously. The political scene in India depressed him, and he contributed a series of trenchant articles to the columns of *Indu Prakash* under the telling caption 'New Lamps for Old'. But the time was inopportune yet for political action, and after this first burst of self-expression he withdrew into silence. Yet his pen was not idle; politics may be taboo for the time being, but not literature. And so 'New Lamps for Old' was followed by a series of articles on the art of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Already in these early prose writings we can mark the sinuosity and balance, the imagery and colour, the trenchancy and sarcasm that were to distinguish the maturer prose writings of the 'Bandemātaram' period.

The Baroda period was the significant seed-time of Sri Aurobindo's life, for he seems to have pursued his varied interests—teaching, poetry, even politics—simultaneously. *Songs to Myrtilla* appeared in 1895, and was followed next year by the narrative poem, *Urvasie*. He completed also *Love and Death*, another long poem, besides the first draft of *Savitri*. Some of his blank verse plays too—notably *Perseus the Deliverer*—belong to this period. Drawn slowly to the centre of revolutionary politics in Bengal, in 1905 Sri Aurobindo wrote *Bhavani Mandir*, 'A Handbook for Revolutionaries dedicated to the service of Bhavani', which caused deep concern to the bureaucracy. In April 1906 he attended the Barisal Political Conference and took the plunge into politics at last. This meant his leaving the Baroda College, but other arduous duties awaited him in Calcutta. In August 1906, he assumed charge as Editor of the *Bandemātaram*, a new English daily started by Bepin Chandra Pal. A year later he was arrested in connection with the publication of certain articles in his paper, but was later honourably acquitted. The infructuous prosecution, however, successfully projected Sri Aurobindo as an all-India leader of

infinite potentialities, and when he attended the Surat Congress in December, he was obliged to take a leading part in the deliberations of the Nationalist (Extremist) Party. It was about this time, too, that Sri Aurobindo came under the influence of Yogi Lele, and had his first realization of the Vedantic-Advaitic experience of utter silence of the mind for three whole days. During the first four months of 1908, Sri Aurobindo managed to engage himself in Yoga as well as Politics, the complete inner calm achieved through Yoga sustaining his hectic outer activity. On 4 May 1908, he was arrested in connection with the Muzzaferpore bomb outrage that had taken place a few days earlier. The trial was a protracted one, and eminent counsel was engaged on both sides. It was during his detention in the Alipur Jail that Sri Aurobindo had the ineffable mystic experience of 'Narayana Darshan', and this effected a profound change in his entire outlook. As he described this experience later (in the celebrated Uttarpara Speech):

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door, and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arm of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.

Once again, Sri Aurobindo was acquitted without a stain on his character, and he came out in May 1909 and soon afterwards launched a new weekly, the *Karmayogin*. But his heart was not in politics, he felt the strong pull of spiritual life, and hence in February 1910 he left Calcutta and ultimately reached Pondicherry on 4 April 1910, and remained there for the rest of his life.

During his first years at Pondicherry—the years of 'silent Yoga'—he was associated with the Tamil revolutionaries, V. V. S. Aiyar and Subramania Bharati. Disciples slowly gathered round

Sri Aurobindo, and so an Ashram came into existence. On 29 March 1914, Madame Mirra Richard (now known as the Mother), who was herself on a spiritual quest, met Sri Aurobindo and made the following note:

It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth: His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established on earth.

The Richards and Sri Aurobindo launched on 15 August 1914 the *Arya*, the monthly philosophical journal devoted to the exposition of an integral view of life and existence. As the Richards left for France soon afterwards, on Sri Aurobindo fell the burden of running the journal, and it was his contributions that mainly filled its pages till its discontinuance in 1921. Most of these periodical contributions have since been revised and reissued in book form, and works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *Renaissance in India* and *Heraclitus* have already taken their place in general and philosophical literature.

With Madame Richard's return to Pondicherry in April 1920, the Ashram began to acquire a clearer definition, and after 24 November 1926 (when it is said Sri Aurobindo experienced 'the descent of Krishna in the physical'), she took full charge of the Ashram and came to be known as the Mother. For a period of about twelve years (1926-1938), Sri Aurobindo was in complete retirement, seeing hardly anybody, but keeping in contact with his disciples through written replies—often detailed replies—to their queries regarding their spiritual problems. There was some relaxation regarding the rules relating to his retirement during the later years, and on certain days in the year—called the '*darshan* days'—his disciples and other visitors to the Ashram were allowed to have *darshan* of the Master. When the second World War came, Sri Aurobindo declared himself openly on the side of the Allies, and encouraged his disciples to contribute to the war effort in every possible way. In August 1940, when it seemed as though Hitler's hordes would overwhelm all Europe and all

civilization, Sri Aurobindo wrote a remarkable poem, *The Children of Wotan* (1940); to the leading question,

Where is the end of your armoured march, O children of
Wotan?

Earth shudders with fear at your tread, the death-flame
laughs in your eyes . . .

Wotan's children gleefully give the answer:

We have seen the sign of Thor and the hammer of new
creation,

A seed of blood on the soil, a flower of blood in the skies.

We march to make of earth a hell and call it heaven . . .

The cry of the broken world is nothing to Wotan's children, for they are confessedly "pitiless, mighty and glad" and their will "has the edge of the thunderbolts". To another question, they return the defiant answer:

We mock at God, we have silenced the mutter of priests at
his altar.

Our leader is master of Fate, medium of her mysteries.

We have made the mind a cypher, we have strangled Thought
with a cord; . . .

A cross of beast and demoniac with the godhead of power
and will,

We are born in humanity's sunset, to the Night is our
pilgrimage . . .

Meantime *The Life Divine* had appeared in book form and compelled discriminating attention, and in 1942 the two volumes of his *Collected Poems and Plays* appeared. He was also engaged on the magnum opus, the philosophical epic, *Savitri*, which started appearing in instalments from 1946 onwards.

Sri Aurobindo's seventy-fifth birthday coincided with the dawn of independence in India. "I take this identification", he said in his message to the nation, "not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life". Earlier, in 1942, he had advised the country to accept the proposals made by Sir Stafford Cripps for the solution of the Indian political impasse.

but the purblind Congress leaders rejected the proposals and preferred to launch the 'Quit India' movement. Sri Aurobindo saw the world war, neither as a fight between nations and governments, still less between good peoples and bad peoples, but essentially as a grapple "between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric", and he felt that to side with the Allies would be the right course under the circumstances:

What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race . . .

When the proposal to cut India into two nations was seriously made in 1947 and was accepted by the Congress leaders, Sri Aurobindo felt strongly that it was *not* a solution; he warned that the unity and greatness of the country couldn't be achieved through this lunatic process of partition and vivisection; and he authorized the Mother to make the significant affirmation:

In spite of all, India has a single soul, and while we have to wait till we can speak of an India one and indivisible, our cry must be:
'Let the soul of India live for ever!'

The after-Partition massacres were a testing time for the nation and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on his way to prayer came as the culminating shock to a people who were already finding that the taste of the flawed and fissured freedom that had come to them was turning sour and bitter. But Sri Aurobindo broke his silence yet once again and gave us eyes to see the future with hope and faith:

... the Light which led to freedom, though not yet to unity, still burns and will burn on till it conquers. I believe firmly that a great and united future is the destiny of this nation and its peoples A free and united India will be there and the Mother will gather around her her sons and weld them into a single national strength in the life of a great and united people.

Less than three years later, however, came the event of Sri Aurobindo's own passing away on the morning of 5 December 1950. For several days more the body reposed "in a grandeur of victorious quiet, with thousands upon thousands having *darshan* of it", being charged as it seemed with a concentration of supernatural light. At last, on 9 December 1950, the body was buried in the premises of the Ashram.

To many of his contemporaries, Sri Aurobindo was a power out of the ordinary, a star that dwelt apart. Even in his Baroda days, A. B. Clark the Principal of the Baroda College felt that there was mystic fire and light in Sri Aurobindo's eyes, penetrating into the beyond; if Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Sri Aurobindo probably saw heavenly visions! After meeting him in his Ashram on 29 May 1928, Rabindranath Tagore made this note:

At the very first sight I could realize that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realization had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine, which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life.

Romain Rolland saw in Sri Aurobindo the foremost of Indian thinkers, the greatest synthesis that has yet been realized of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe, the last of the great Rishis who held in his hand, "in firm unrelaxed grip, the bow of creative energy". The poet, J. A. Chadwick (Arjava), wrote in 1936 of Sri Aurobindo's Consciousness:

That living Lotus, petal by petal unfolding,
Which through the mists of this *avidya* looms,
Vicegerent of the Sun, nowise withholding
The light we lack in Maya's nether glooms . . .

O puissant heart amidst whose raptured shrining
A nameless Love is garbed in Name's disguise,
Last metronome to mortal things assigning
A fadeless rhythm wrung from Dawn's echoing skies.

When Sri Aurobindo passed away on 5 December 1950, it was

difficult to grasp the full meaning of what had happened. One of the most moving tributes was J. Vijayatunga's:

Are we sad today? Is the earth dark without light?
 Nay, Master, Thou didst not live in vain,
 Thy life sublime and austere was not spent
 For naught . . . Holding to the hem
 Of Thy garment we shall raise ourselves
 To High Heaven, by Thy Grace, if not now
 In some distant age, and once again
 We shall behold Thee, O Master,
 Shining with ever greater lustre, shining
 Like the Sun, but unafraid we shall reach Thee
 And touch Thee, and be burnt in the Fire
 Of Thy love.

Recalling the event five years later, K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) ruefully felt that 'Heaven's light' is apparently at the mercy of 'mortal doom', for 'Time's brute hand' can annul great mortal creations like the Parthenon, the frescoes at Ajanta, or "the two grand plays . . . the titan mind of Aeschylus set beside *Prometheus Bound*"; yet the death of 'divine Aurobindo' was not as other deaths were:

But this one death where Heaven's own self gave room
 For dire eclipse of its eternity
 Has spent the whole blind force of mortal doom
 Against the scul's vision of a wondrous sod
 In which the Undying can work His artistry.
 Now Man breaks free to grow for ever God.

How could the memory of "all heaven's secrecy lit to one face" fade even with the passage of time? "I am here, I am here", he seems to affirm still.

While Sri Aurobindo certainly played several 'parts' during the many decades of his terrestrial existence, it is no less true that they had an integral relation to one another. The politician, the poet, the philosopher, and the Yogi were all of a piece, and made the sum—the Power—that was Rishi Aurobindo. He turned the political movement in the country towards the right goal, and even determined somewhat the pace of its progress; he defined the ends, and he helped to forge the means. In his philosophy

and Yoga, again, Sri Aurobindo went further and turned the current of human progress itself towards the goal of Supermanhood, and laboured for long years fashioning the means of attaining the goal. And even his poetry was meant to bridge the present and the future, self-divided present life and the Life Divine that is to be. The Seer has glimpsed the contours of ultimate Possibility, the mystic poet has hymned his "gloried fields of trance"; the philosopher has sought to interpret the Vision in terms of reason, while the Yogi has formulated a method, a multiform technique, for achieving the desired total change in consciousness; the sociologist has thrown out significant hints with regard to the organization of tomorrow's world, while the creative critic has sensed the rhythms of the 'Future Poetry' and described how the 'new' poet will ride on the wings of an elemental spirituality and articulate the ineluctable rhythms of the Spirit.

Considered merely as a poet and critic of poetry, Sri Aurobindo would still rank among the supreme masters of our time. His poetical output represents the creative effort of about sixty years and, on a modest estimate, may run to some three thousand pages. There are the five blank verse plays, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric*. *Perseus* is based on a myth of ancient Greece; *Vasavadutta* is a tale of ancient India; *Rodogune* is a Syrian romance, the *Viziers* takes us back to the spacious days of the great Haroun al Rashid, while *Eric* is a romance of Scandinavia, a tale of war and love about the children of Odín and Thor. The heroines of all these plays have beauty for their birthmark, and their beauty is also their fate; their beauty and their capacity for love enable them to defy and master their fate. Andromeda who is chained to a rock, King Udyan who is jailed by his enemy, Rodogune the captive princess, Anice-al-jalice the slave-girl, Eric the fierce 'Man of Destiny' who begins by denying Love, all, all are redeemed by love, for, as Aslaug sings in *Eric*,

Love is divine.

Love is the hoop of the gods

Hearts to combine.

Love is not love if it acquiesces in evil; great and true love is a

power, and it can break open the doors of captivity; it can change dross to gold, it can defy death—or it is not Love!

Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by Love.

“Not Thor for thee, but Freya”; not the doom of Hate, but the Grace of Love; not death, but life. Such is the recurrent assertion in Sri Aurobindo’s plays which are steeped in poetry, romance and prophecy.

Sri Aurobindo’s mastery of blank verse, the veritable Djin of English prosody, is seen, not only in the five full-length plays, but also in the epyllions, *Urvasie* and *Love and Death*, the heroic poem, *Baji Prabhou*, in translations and adaptations from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and, above all, in *Savitri* the ‘cosmic epic’ that was fifty years a-growing. In *Urvasie* as well as in *Love and Death*, indomitable love is presented as beating against the gates of mortality and gaining a victory over Death in one or another way. While Pururavas makes a passage to Indra’s Kingdom and attains an immortal’s status to be for ever united with Urvasie, Ruru (in *Love and Death*) invades Pātāla (Hades) to reclaim lost Priyumvada and willingly barter away half his own life to live the other half with his restored wife. Both the narratives are quarried from the ranges of deathless Romance, for Pururavas and Ruru are great lovers, and Urvasie and Priyumvada are truly worthy of their love. Yet Sri Aurobindo seems to imply that the lovers have somehow failed, and have, after all, preferred the lesser realization of personal felicity to the greater realization of world redemption and total transformation of our earth-nature. It is Savitri alone who fuses the lesser and the greater realizations into an integral and total transformation of limited human life into the fulness and splendour of the Life Divine.

The evocative power and rich resilience of Sri Aurobindo’s early blank verse may be illustrated by citing two or three passages. Love’s fierce storm and its aftermath of nervous calm are here rendered with a potent and delicate artistry:

She, o’erborne,
Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,
Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,

Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek
 And golden throat averted, and wide trouble
 In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss.
 Amid her wind-blown hair their faces met.
 With her sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts
 Tumultuous up against his beating heart,
 He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven's desire.
 So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge.

Sensuous though not sensual, this is love's ecstasy made vivid by the power of words, even as 'ascent' and 'descent'—ascent towards the snowy heights of the Himalaya and descent towards Pātāla—are vivified in the following passages:

Uneasy, to a silent place he came
 Within a heaped enormous region piled
 With prone far-drifting hills, huge peaks o'erwhelmed
 Under the vast illimitable snows,—
 Snow on ravine, and snow on cliff, and snow
 Sweeping in strenuous outlines to heaven,
 With distant gleaming vales and turbulent rocks,
 Giant precipices black-hewn and bold
 Daring the universal whiteness . . .

Horizon on horizon moved
 Dreadfully swift; then with a prone wide sound
 All Ocean hollowing drew him swiftly in,
 Curving with monstrous menace over him.
 He down the gulf where the loud waves collapsed
 Descending . . .
 And came beneath the flood and stunned beheld
 A mute stupendous march of waters race
 To reach some viewless pit beneath the world.

For vigour and vividness and suggestion of excitement, these lines from *Baji Prabhou* may be cited:

So was the fatal gorge
 Filled with the clamour of the close-locked fight.
 Sword rang on sword, the slogan shout, the cry
 Of guns, the hiss of bullets filled the air,
 And murderous strife heaped up the scanty space,
 Rajput and strong Mahratta breathing hard
 In desperate battle.

Baji Prabhou's valour recalls that of Leonidas at Thermopylae, and the poem is charged with energy and movement, and powerfully evokes the shifting scenes of the battle and becomes a living memorial to Baji's great-hearted sacrifice.

Sri Aurobindo's verse translations from the original Sanskrit and Bengali are in a class apart. These were but the casual by-products of a literary career devoted in the main to other creative ends, even as the literary career itself was but one of Sri Aurobindo's diverse creative facets. 'The Hero and the Nymph' is Sri Aurobindo's blank verse translation of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasie*, and there is no better translation of this play in English. The Pururavas-Urvasie story has a venerable ancestry, going back indeed to a Lander-like but obscure imaginary conversation imbedded in the *Rig Veda* as also in the *Satapatha Brahmana*. Kalidasa's Urvasie is "the ornament of Eden and its joy", half-nymph half-woman, daughter of a Rishi's *tapasya* and the darling of gods and men, but hers is not the mystic wonder and magic of the Vedic or the Brahmana myth. For all the witchery she exercises on Pururavas, for all her other-world whimsies and feminine vagaries, she is clearly not a patch on Kalidasa's other heroine, Sakuntala. The central scene in the play is a succession of poetic peaks, for here the distraught Pururavas wanders in search of lost Urvasie, peering here, peering there, fixing his eager gaze, now at the lowering sky, now at the rain-drenched earth. There is between the Lear of the storm scene and the Pururavas of this scene all the difference between tragedy and romance. Whereas Lear defies the storm and bares himself to the fury of the elements, Pururavas' reactions are less turbulent and sulphurous:

the signs

Of storm are now my only majesty;
This sky with lightning gilt and laced becomes
My canopy of splendour, and the trees
Of rain-time waving wide their lavish bloom
Fan me; the sapphire-throated peacocks, voiced
Sweeter for that divorce from heat, are grown
My poets; the mountains are my citizens.
They pour out all their streams to swell my greatness.

And so on and on and on. There is no doubt something magnificently pathetic and beautiful in this continuum of self-prodding

and self-lacerating anguish—in this singular mixture of reverie and recapitulation, this rhythmic dance of mounting hopes and abject despairs—and yet the reader cannot help feeling that he is given too much of a good thing, plied too much with this rich romantic vintage. However, the two interlinked worlds of *Vikramorvasie* are sensual love's essential heartlessness and irresponsibility and its apparent illimitable ardours and ecstasies; and these are duly reflected in Sri Aurobindo's English version as well.

Apart from 'The Hero and the Nymph', Sri Aurobindo's translations include the epigrammatic and aphoristic 'The Century of Life' (from Bhartrihari), the devotional songs of Chandidas and Vicjapati, 'Vidula' (from the *Mahabharata*), and 'Songs of the Sea' (from the original Bengali of C. R. Das). It was Das who defended Sri Aurobindo at the Alipur trial, and the poet and lawyer was also a patriot, and became one of the principal lieutenants of Mahatma Gandhi during the non-cooperation movement. Das's 'Songs of the Sea' (*Sagar-Sangit*) are more than mere nature-poems. As the sea is to Ellidda in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, to C. R. Das—and to Sri Aurobindo also—it is a symbol of mystery and romance, a baffling complex of primordial nature. The forty 'songs' are in a variety of rhythms, and always, with an unerring sureness of touch, they evoke the strange lure of the sea, its abiding sublimity and its bottomless mystery. The poet approaches the sea as a friend, as a lover, as a loyal subject, as a devotee, as a shadow that ever pursues the object, as a waif that would return to the bosom of the mother; and the music of the verse steals over us, or casts on us a spell, or simply overwhelms us:

What word is it thou sing'st? what tune
My heart is filled with, and it soon
Must overflow? What mystical unborn
Spirit is singing in thy white foam-caves?
What voice turns heaven to music from thy waves? . . .

How many aeons hast thou flowed like this,
The torture of this music in thy heart . . .
What hunger sobs in thee? What vehement thirst?
What tireless anguish moans implacably?
Moans many a thousand ages,
Moans many a million lives . . .

My thirst is great, O mighty One! deep, deep
 The thirst is in my heart unsatisfied.
 Ah, drown me in thy dumb unfathomed sleep . . .

What rhythmic hymn of power dost thou repeat?
 Initiate me, Ocean calm, complete
 My heart of worship with thy mystic word:
 Let all my soul with one wide prayer be stirred.

Quotation can but give a distorted picture, for the whole sequence of forty 'songs' is to be viewed as a unity, even as the waves coming one upon another make the sea. The French poet, Saint-John Perse, has attempted a similar feat in his great poem *Amers*, now translated by Wallace Fowlie as *Seamarks*, from which one or two characteristic passages may be cited for comparison with 'Songs of the Sea':

And mesh to mesh is repeated the immense web of poetry: the Sea herself, on her page, like a sacred recitative . . .

We besiege you, Splendour! and we shall be your parasites, hive of the gods, O thousand, thousand chambers of the foam and a thousand more of the foam where the transgression is accomplished . . .

In you, who move, we move also, in you, living, we keep silence and we live you at last, sea of alliance,

O sea luminous instance and sea very glorious substance, we acclaim you at last in your radiance of sea and in your own essence . . .

Sagar-Sangit or *Amers*, the poem (even in translation) has the ring of the recordation of the cry of the Jiva for final union with the supreme Spirit that rules the Sea and all Nature and the entire universe. It is thus not very far from mystical poetry.

The lyric range of Sri Aurobindo embraces *Songs to Myrtilla* (1895) at one end and, at the other end, numerous sonnets and experiments in quantitative verse. There is in even a very early poem such disarming play of fancy and rhythmic lilt and skill as in these lines:

Not from the mighty sea
 Love visited me.
 I found as in a jewelled box

Love, rose-red, sleeping with imprisoned locks;
 And I have ever known him wild
 And merry as a child,
 As roses red, as roses sweet,
 The west wind in his feet,
 Tulip-girdled, kind and bold,
 With heartsease in his curls of gold . . .

Writing fifty years later, Sri Aurobindo could attempt the fusion of the sardonic and poetry in a sonnet like 'A Dream of Surreal Science':

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
 At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
 A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
 Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.
 A thyroid, meditating almost nude
 Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
 And, rising from its mighty solitude,
 Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.
 A brain by a disordered stomach driven
 Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell.
 From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.
 Thus wagged on the surreal world, until
 A scientist played with atoms and blew out
 The universe before God had time to shout.

And there is even the play of humorous observation and reverie in 'Despair on the Staircase', written at about the same time:

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,
 An image of magnificent despair;
 The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise
 Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.
 In her beauty's dumb significant pose I find
 The tragedy of her mysterious mind.
 Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.
 A musing mask is her immobile face.
 Her tail is up like an unconquered flag;
 Its dignity knows not the right to wag.
 An animal creature wonderfully human,
 A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman,
 Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,
 Is now the problem I am wondering at.

For a change there is also 'The Tiger and the Deer' in free quantitative verse that brilliantly projects the bright and burning terror of the forest and at the same time insinuates the splendid future possibility of terror being exceeded by peace, death by life:

Brilliant, crouching, slouching, what crept through the green
heart of the forest,
Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and soft soundless paws of
grandeur and murder?
. . . . But the great beast crouched and crept, and crept and
crouched a last time, noiseless, fatal,
Till suddenly death leaped on the beautiful wild deer as it drank
Unsuspecting from the great pool in the forest's coolness . . .
But a day may yet come when the tiger crouches and leaps no
more . . .
As the mammoth shakes no more the plains of Asia;
Still then shall the beautiful wild deer drink from the coolness
of great pools in the leaves' shadow.
The mighty perish in their might;
The slain survive the slayer.

On the other hand, the main bulk of Sri Aurobindo's lyrical poetry is suffused with a philosophical or mystical glow. At no period of his life was he blind to the spiritual reality behind the material facade; never did he countenance either of the classic negations—the total denial of phenomenal life or the total denial of spiritual life. Through all the astonishing vicissitudes of his life, there nevertheless ran the strong, silken thread of aspiration to achieve an integral view of man, Nature and God. He sometimes formulated, merely with the aid of his lucid and nimble intellect, a total world-view; but that was merely ancillary or antecedent to the satisfying world-view that was to be reared on the sure foundations of his mystical and Yogic experiences. It was in the Alipur Jail that Sri Aurobindo had his direct apprehension of omnipresent Reality,—Narayana inhabiting the prison and the prisoners, the bars of the cell and the leaves of the tree, everything and everybody, all in one and one in all. The experience was doubtless followed by others, and he had also experienced earlier at Baroda, as we have seen, the absolute condition of silence of the mind that was to envelop him as a protective sphere for the rest of his life. But mystic experiences, of whatever

kind, must ordinarily defy analysis and description alike. All the same, the mystic poet *would* attempt the impossible, try to express in words experiences that are essentially ineffable. If mystical poetry is difficult for one reason, philosophical poetry is difficult for another—the unavoidable intrusion of thought and logic. Yet Lucretius and Dante have dared and mastered the impossible, for the word could be power, and the poetic word could charge logic itself with the incandescence of magic, and give to the ‘airy nothings’ of mystical experience the vividness and permanent significance of autonomous poetry. What we expect such poetry to give us is not a system of thought but the glow and the force of thought, not philosophy, but the living potency of philosophy; what mystic poetry should give us, again, is not a laborious transcription of such supernatural experience but rather a re-enacting—a repetition—of the experience in which we may ourselves be totally and unescapably engaged. Philosophical poetry, like mystical poetry, is difficult to achieve, but not impossible. Confronted by the crisis in expression, the great poet *can* master it and safely come through, as Sri Aurobindo,—and others before him,—have done.

In an early long poem, ‘In the Moonlight’, there is effective philosophizing in verse after the manner of Tennyson’s ‘Two Voices’. The articulation is rhetorical and adequate rather than disturbing or incantatory:

The intellect is not all; a guide within
Awaits our question. He it was informed
The reason, He surpasses; and unformed
Presages of His mightiness begin . . .

But there is presently a rise in the tempo of expression in the stanza:

The old shall perish; it shall pass away,
Expunged, annihilated, blotted out;
And all the iron bands that ring about
Man’s wide expansion shall at last give way.

A much longer poem, *Ahana* was originally written at Pondicherry when Sri Aurobindo had already “a sure basis, a wide knowledge

and some mastery of the secret"; the version now included in the second volume of *Collected Poems and Plays* is an enlarged and recast version of the original, and runs to over 500 lines in quantitative rhymed Hexameters. It may thus be described as a kind of palimpsest, a convenient bridge between the sensuous, exuberant and intellectually alert poet of *Urvashi, Love and Death* and 'In the Moonlight' on the one hand and the yogin-singer of *Thought the Paraclete* and *Rose of God* and the futurist bard of *Savitri* on the other. In *Ahana* (as also in the unfinished epic, *Ilion*) Sri Aurobindo tried to naturalize the classical Hexameter in English—an attempt that had seldom succeeded in the past. But *Ahana* is in rhymed Hexameter, which is inviting double trouble and facing added difficulty; but Sri Aurobindo's justification is that "rhyme can be used for poems of reflective thought or lyrical feeling", though it should not lead to "melodic monotone". In his essay on Quantitative Metre, Sri Aurobindo points out that in any scheme to make quantity a principle of English verse all three elements of metre—accent, stress and quantity—should be harnessed for the purpose, and united and fused together. Unfortunately, the number of long-vowel syllables is not sufficient to construct quantitative metres with them alone. Sri Aurobindo therefore advocates the addition to their number of stressed syllables as well, and argues that stress invariably confers 'weight-length' on a syllable and that such length is as legitimate as intrinsic length. Besides, a wide-ranging modulation has to be accepted as the bye-law of the Hexameter in English and brought into judicious play. And, above all, unless a rich enough theme is yoked to the Hexameter, the movement must fail to produce the effect of beauty combined with majesty and force.

Ahana has a dramatic cast, though it is drama with a difference:

Ahana, the Dawn of God, descends on the world where amid the strife and trouble of mortality, the Hunters of Joy, the Seekers after Knowledge, the Climbers in the quest of Power are toiling up the slopes or waiting in the valleys. As she stands on the mountains of the East, voices of the Hunters of Joy are the first to greet her.

Such is Sri Aurobindo's brief prefatory note. Power, Knowledge, Joy—action, meditation, love—these have been the classical ends, and the perennial means for achieving them; and the ends have

been in their turn the means to a further, a converging, end—Felicity. But at the further threshold man has halted, being bewildered or beaten back. Power, Knowledge, Joy have alike failed to pierce the far gates of the Invisible—the limited puissan-ces, the faded lights, the glow-worm joys have offered but to deny, have taught only to confuse, have roused the appetite only to disappoint. Action has by itself taken him along the high road of exertion to the valley of semi-fulfilment; Thought as such has helped him to scale step by step the dizzy climb, but puzzled and exhausted he has had to stop in mid-career, too wise to come down, too weak to strive further; Love has given him wings, he has shot across the air and reached a high mountain-top, eager and panting, breathing the pure free air of the outskirts of heaven. No wonder that, when Ahana appears, Love sees the goddess first and, delighted, accosts her. But the greater includes the lesser—and therefore Love instinctively sums up her own and her companions' predicament as well. The Hunters of Joy are no doubt the first to speak, but the others too—the Seekers after Knowledge and the Climbers in the quest for Power—are with them in mind and spirit. *Ahana* is Humanity responding to the first intimations of the Divine. Nothing more dramatic, of deeper spiritual urgency to fear-haunted, defeat-ridden and frailty-spun man, can be easily imagined. The formal outer stage is, if you will, the entire Himalayan range; but the only stage that really matters is the inner stage, the human heart, for it is in that sanctuary that the drama is played and must be played to a finish. Just as in the *Gita* the real Kurukshetra is the battle-ground of the human soul, just as Arjuna the puzzled devotee and Krishna the divine teacher are *here* within, the former with his perplexities, his trembling hands, his cast-down Gandiva, the latter with his logic, his illuminating gospel, his magic of ineffable transcendence, they are both here within ourselves, however veiled and obscured, even so, the Hunter of Joy, the Seeker after Knowledge, the Climber in the quest for Power—the bhakti-yogin, the jnana-yogin and the karma-yogin—are all here, they are within ourselves and are ourselves, however their identities may be hidden behind our tempestuous passions, cloud-capped ambitions and befogged prejudices; and when Ahana appears at last, in answer to our strivings and prayers and adorations, she too is seen only

on the Himalayas of our soul and is greeted with music that is wordless though it uses words:

Vision delightful alone on the hills whom the silences cover,
 Closer yet lean to mortality; human, stoop to thy lover.
 Wonderful, gold like a moon in the square of the sun where
 thou strayest
 Glimmers thy face amid crystal purities; mighty thou playest
 Sole on the peaks of the world, unafraid of thy loneliness.
 Glances
 Leap from thee down to us, dream-seas and light-falls and
 magical trances;
 Sun-drops flake from thy eyes and the heart's caverns packed
 are with pleasure
 Strange like a song without words or the dance of a measure-
 less measure.
 Tread through the edges of dawn, over twilight's grey-lidded
 margin;
 Heal earth's unease with thy feet, O heaven-born delicate
 virgin.

Ilion is an even more ambitious attempt than *Ahana*, being about ten times as long, and grappling boldly with a Homeric theme. Certainly a tour-de-force, *Ilion* is a Homeric exercise in the Heroic, but almost out-Homering Homer in the fullness of the recital and the gorgeousness of the imagery. The 'fable' is built round Achilles and Penthesilea the Amazonian Queen, and is laden with varied overtones and undertones. Penthesilea is presented as an *Indian* Queen, and great is her courage and strength of resolution. Only nine out of the projected twelve Books of the epic are now extant, and except for the first 381 lines of the opening Book, the rest is no more than a rough incomplete draft of the poem which Sri Aurobindo wanted to write. Even so *Ilion* impresses by its bulk and the sheer audacity of its conception and also by the lavish amplitude of its execution. The description of Dawn with which the poem opens is among the finest things in Sri Aurobindo, surpassed only by the evocation of 'The Symbol Dawn' in *Savitri*. To read the poem at a stretch is to participate in the movement and majesty of an ocean liner making a passage across the Pacific:

Nine long years had passed and the tenth now was wearily
 ending,

Years of the wrath of the gods, and the leaguer still threatened
 the ramparts
 Since through a tranquil morn the ships came past Tenedos
 sailing
 And the first Argive fell slain as he leaped on the Phrygian
 beaches . . .
 Hidden from human knowledge the brilliant shapes of
 Immortals
 Mingled unseen in the mellay, or sometimes, marvellous,
 maskless,
 Forms of undying beauty and power that made tremble the
 heart-strings
 Parting their deathless secrecy crossed through the borders of
 vision . . .
 Vain was the toil of the heroes, the blood of the mighty was
 squandered,
 Spray as of surf on the cliffs when it moans unappeased,
 unrequited
 Age after fruitless age. Day hunted the steps of the
 nightfall;
 Joy succeeded to grief: defeat only greatened the vanished,
 Victory offered an empty delight without guerdon or profit . . .

There can be no uncertainty about this imperious dactylic measure, its richness and sustained puissance and fullness; and this really is something new to modern English poetry. The debate of the Trojan statesmen—recalling the debate of the fallen angels in Book II of *Paradise Lost*—is elaborated at almost extravagant length, while the various partings introduce human touches that linger in the mind. The debate in Troy is paralleled by the debate in the Greek camp; and Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus and others sway the discussion, now this side, now the other side. And there is a third debate, too,—on Olympus; the gods and goddesses weigh the future in the balance till Zeus, who sees further than the rest, pronounces the immitigable doom, not of Troy alone, but of later empires as well. The Trojan will yield to the Hellene, the Hellene to the Roman, and the Roman to the Barbarian. At last Troy's fate is sealed by the Olympian Synod: "And in the noon there was night. And Apollo passed out of Troya". In the battle that follows, the focal points are Achilles and Pentheseia, and the poem breaks off abruptly, with both still fighting, and the issue left yet undecided. *Ilion* is obviously Greek and Homeric in inspiration, but without ceasing to be Aurobindonian

at the same time; on the other hand, being incomplete like Keats's *Hyperion*, *Ilion* too remains only a great possibility that has been but partly realized.¹

Sri Aurobindo's later lyrics—*Six Poems* (1934), *Poems* (1941) and several of those included in *Last Poems* (1952) as also in 'Poems in Quantitative Metres' printed at the end of the second volume of *Collected Poems and Plays*—were an attempt to achieve in English verse something analogous to the Vedic *mantra*. The Vedic *mantra* was the natural medium for mystic poetry, and it was Sri Aurobindo's considered view that the 'future poetry'—even in English or especially in English—will more and more approximate to the *mantra*, minimizing, if not wholly eliminating, the meddling middlemen—the intellect, the senses, even the imagination—and effecting in one swift unfailing step the miracle of communication from the poet to the reader. As Sri Aurobindo has remarked in *The Future Poetry*,

... the true creator (of poetry), the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claims to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine Ananda . . . is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it.

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo developed a whole theory of 'overhead' poetry, and in the poems of his last great period he tried to conquer "the human difficulties of the task" and create a body of *mantric* poetry that came as a proper culmination of his long, sustained and inspiring career as a poet in the English language. These poems can, of course, be read simply as poems, ignoring alike Sri Aurobindo's theory of true quantity or his theory of 'overhead aesthesis'. All that is needed is an attentive and receptive ear, a mood of imaginative concentration that sees through forms and received formulas and reaches to the still centre, the radiant source of the poetic communication. One will presently

¹ For a critical study of *Ilion*, the reader is referred to Prema Nandakumar's 'Approaches to *Ilion*' in *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, XX Number, 1964.

grow familiar with these worlds of intensities, these symbol kingdoms, these occult regions, these inner countries or far plateaus of the Spirit. Such poetry has a tremendous sovereignty of its own, and no adventure can be more thrilling than a flight as that described in *Thought the Paraclete*:

As some bright archangel in vision flies
Plunged in dream-caught spirit immensities,
Past the long green crests of the seas of life,
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind
Flew my thought self-lost in the vast of God.
Sleepless wide great glimmering wings of wind
Bore the gold-red seeking of feet that trod
Space and Time's mute vanishing ends. The face
Lustred, pale-blue-lined of the hippogriff,
Eremitic, sole, daring the boundless ways,
Over world-bare summits of timeless being
Gleamed; the deep twilights of the world-abyss
Failed below. Sun-realms of supernal seeing,
Crimson-white mooned oceans of pauseless bliss
Drew its vague heart-yearning with voices sweet.
Hungering, large-souled to surprise the unconned
Secrets white-fire-veiled of the last Beyond,
Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,
Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned,
Thought the great-winged wanderer paraclete
Disappeared, slow-singing a flame-word rune.
Self was left, lone, limitless, nude, immune.

This is, in the first place, an attempt to naturalize the Catullan hendecasyllabics in English verse. In the second place, it is an attempt to project in terms of poetry the flight of Thought, as it takes off from the normal intellectual plane, and sweeps across the illumined, intuitive and overmental regions, finally disappearing bound for the ultimate. The central idea of the poem, which is the transformation in the Self brought about as a result of the ascent of Consciousness to the supramental level, is suggested by the imagery and the music, rather than closely argued out in terms of logical reason. We are expected to proceed from light to light, from one luminous revelation to another, and anon to the next, and so on, till we arrive at and are lost in the rich illimitable calm of the wonderful last line. Of the four separate 'movements' in the poem, the first (comprising the opening five

lines) describes limited human Thought invading the realms of the Invisible and being "self-lost in the vast of God". The second movement (comprising the next ten lines) follows Thought's progress from Mind to Higher Mind, from Higher Mind to Illumined Mind, from Illumined Mind to Intuition, and from Intuition to Overmind. The third movement (comprising the next six lines) describes Thought racing beyond Overmind and disappearing in the region of the Supermind. The last line marks the concluding movement: the realization of the infinite Self is now complete, the ego is dead, the self is bare of all the sheaths of the Ignorance—it is "lone, limitless, nude, immune."²

² For a fuller discussion of the poem the reader is referred to my 'A Note on *Thought the Paraclete*' in *The Advent*, I, i (February 1944). In a letter to a disciple, while conceding that "Iyengar's geological account is probably as good as any other is likely to be", Sri Aurobindo remarked: "A mystic poem may explain itself or a general idea may emerge from it, but it is the vision that is important or what one can get from it by intuitive feeling, not the explanation or idea; *Thought the Paraclete* is a vision or revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes, but gives no names and no photographic descriptions of the planes crossed". (*Life-Literature-Yoga: Some Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, 1967, pp. 149-150).

'The Life Divine'

The Life Divine is a treatise on metaphysics, and it is also a work of prose art. When it appeared in book form about twenty years ago, Sir Francis Younghusband hailed it as the greatest philosophical religious book published in his time. Besides, it is an immense work, running as it does to over one thousand packed pages. While this is rather forbidding, the title itself fascinates at once, and the power of this fascination never palls. "In reading Sri Aurobindo's colossal work of mystical philosophy, *The Life Divine*", writes Professor Wilson Knight, "I was constantly struck to find how much of his visionary structure was covered by the lucid couplets and fourfold plan of Pope's *Essay*". An Indian critic, D. S. Sarma, describes *The Life Divine* as "a vast philosophical prose epic a philosophical *Divina Commedia* having its Inferno in the Spirit's descent into the ignorance of mind, life and matter, its Purgatorio in the ascent to the true knowledge of the so-called Supermind and its Paradiso in the ineffable mysteries of Satchidananda. His spiritual guides, his Virgil and Beatrice, are the Rig Veda and the *Bhagavad Gita*". There is no doubt that *The Life Divine* is a mighty piece of revelation and prophecy, a prose symphony that envelops the responsive reader in widening circles of peace and realization. On the other hand, the prose often produces on the reader a somewhat hypnotic effect, which is the result of the global sweep and repetitive elaboration of the style. Yet, again, earnest students have found in *The Life Divine* a 'Summa Theologica' for our age, a metaphysical bridge between the West and the East, and a distillation of the 'philosophia perennis'. S. K. Maitra thus describes the book as the last arch in the bridge of thoughts and sighs that spans the history of Aryan culture; Otto Wolff, the German Protestant theologian, says that "it is not only Indians who see in him (Sri Aurobindo) the last arch of a bridge of

human thought and endeavour which leads from the Vedic beginnings to the present, and transcends the ordinary limits of human consciousness"; and Charles A. Moore, after making numerous citations from *The Life Divine*, concludes with the categorical finding:

This, then, is the true wisdom of the Indian mind. It is truly comprehensive. It includes the insights of the East and the insights of the West. It combines their respective unique emphases. It provides, from the point of view of idealism and the significance of spirituality, what might be the inevitable synthesis of what is called the wisdom of the East and the knowledge of the West.

One indeed feels, as the novelist, Dorothy Richardson, once wrote to me after reading *The Life Divine*: "Has there ever existed a more synthetic consciousness than that of Sri Aurobindo? Unifying he is to the limit of the term".

Metaphysical speculations often prove to be arid and inconclusive, offering no clue to present action or what is now-a-days called 'existential commitment.' Milton describes how some of the fallen angels

apart sat on a hill retired,
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate—
Fixt fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.
Of good and evil much they argued then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame:
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy!

There is also Omar Khayyam's rather summary dismissal of philosophy:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

It is with his faculty of Reason that man tries to grasp the name and nature of Reality, but he is himself in it and of it, and there-

fore he cannot stand aside and seize it in its unity and totality. Archimedes said that he would lift the world with a lever provided he could detach himself from the world and station himself elsewhere. Although a strict rational comprehension of Reality is thus ruled out, knowledge through identity is still possible. In the course of a letter to a disciple written in 1930, Sri Aurobindo tried to differentiate between the philosophical systems of the West and the East, between Western metaphysics and the Yoga of the Indian saints. In the West, at least since the time of Plato, intellect, reason, logic has been regarded as the supreme instrument of knowledge, and "even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid". In India, on the other hand, the position has been just the reverse. In the East generally, in India particularly and purposively while no doubt the metaphysical thinkers have tried to approach ultimate Reality through the intellect, they have given such mental constructions only a secondary status, while "the first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience". Without this grounding on spiritual experience and corroboration at every stage by spiritual intuition and illumination, all mere intellectual constructions have been dismissed as of little value. Further, the Indian metaphysical thinker—a Yajnavalkya, a Sankara, a Ramanuja—has almost always been a Yogi and Rishi, one who has armed his philosophy "with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking". It is to the singular credit of a modern German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, that he too has come to realize the limitations of mere Reason. "Thinking", he says, "only begins at the point where we have come to know that Reason, glorified for centuries, is the most obstinate adversary of thinking". Through isolation and analytical scrutiny of detached things and phenomena, the ancient Greeks started the movement of the physical and biological sciences and the result is the impressive edifice of modern civilization. But this gain has also meant, according to Heidegger, the decline and fall of Being; we understand more and more of 'things' (or, shall we say, of *Being* artificially atomized), yet manage to miss the meaning of the background, the Field of Being. The narrowly efficient

way of Reason helps us to read every word in the Book of Nature—or the Book of Being—and yet fail to understand the sense of the whole. Rochester, the seventeenth century poet, said in the course of his Satire against Mankind:

*Reason, an Ignis fatuus in the Mind,
Which leaving light of Nature, sense behind;
Pathless and dang'rous wandering ways it takes
Through errors, Fenny-Boggs, and Thorny Brakes;
Whilst the misguided follower, climbs with pain,
Mountains of Whimseys, heap'd in his own Brain:
Stumbling from thought to thought, falls head-long down,
Into doubts boundless Sea, where like to drown,
Books bear him up awhile, and make him try,
To swim with Bladders of Philosophy . . .*

Analytical Reason, shutting its eyes to the 'light of Nature', pursues specialist paths with the help of artificial lights and more often than not comes to grief. The Oriental attitude has been basically different. "In neither India nor China", writes William Barrett in his *Irrational Man*, "nor in the philosophies that these civilizations produced, was truth located in the intellect. On the contrary, the Indian and Chinese sages insisted on the very opposite: namely, that man does not attain to truth so long as he remains locked up in his intellect". As Sri Aurobindo has said succinctly: "Reason was the helper; Reason is the bar". While not rejecting Reason, it is still necessary to surpass it if we wish to see ourselves in relation to Being,—if we wish to recognize ourselves as Being. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Yajnavalkya tells his wife Maitreyi:

Not for love of the husband is a husband dear but for the love of the Soul (Atman) is a husband dear.

Not for love of the wife is a wife dear but for the love of the Soul is a wife dear.

Not for the love of the sons are the sons dear but for the Soul are sons dear . . .

And so on: the love of cattle, the love of wealth, the love of this or that castehood, the love of the worlds or the gods, the love of the Vedas—what is any of these 'loves' worth unless it be the love of the Atman, the source and soul of all, the womb and

seed of all, the quintessential Being that is also the inherent total Possibility? To reach this knowledge of Being, to strive towards this Possibility, is the whole point and purpose of breaking through the barrier of Reason and seeking the aid of spiritual illumination. The dazzling lid that covers the face of Truth will then fall aside, and all ambiguities and perplexities will cease.

The central problems of philosophy were formulated by Kant in the form of three questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for? These questions carry the content of the Indian concepts of *tattva*, *hita* and *purushartha*. And *The Life Divine* is Sri Aurobindo's elaborate answer to these basic problems of philosophy. On the other hand, the answer is no mere intellectual exercise but rather flows from Sri Aurobindo's own spiritual experiences and realizations. As he pointed out in the *Arya* for July 1918:

The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt should be made were already present to us . . . but the complete intellectual statement of them and their results and issues had to be found. This meant a continuous thinking, a high and subtle and difficult thinking on several lines, and this strain, which we had to impose on ourselves, we are obliged to impose also on our readers.

Without the river itself and the perennial supply of water, there is indeed no question of harnessing the waters, or organizing a multi-purpose project; but this harnessing and organization too are important, and call for 'high and subtle and difficult' plans, techniques and processes. Sri Aurobindo talks of 'several lines' of thinking, although all start from a central 'spiritual experience', a core of apprehended 'general truths'. One line of enquiry took the shape of *The Life Divine*; and this was, indeed, the life-line of the Aurobindonian world-view. But there were subsidiary or collateral lines of inquiry also, and these led to diverse structures of thought or chains of illuminating interpretation and comment. We have thus *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and *The Future Poetry*, impressive edifices one and all, boldly conceived and structured at once with imagination and a sense of particularity. Although originally written under the peculiar exigencies of periodical pub-

lication in the monthly journal, *Arya*, their central sustaining inspiration gives them form and unity—for each of them and for all of them taken together—and claim and secure for their author a place both among the great thinkers of our time and the supreme masters of English prose. These eight treatises (including *The Life Divine*) comprise varied realms of knowledge—metaphysics, Yoga, sociology, politics, exegesis, interpretation, cultural history, creative criticism—and there is both vastness in range as well as massiveness in bulk. Yet all great ideas are fundamentally so simple that a child should be able to grasp them. There *must* lie behind the seeming multiplicity and complex variety of the Aurobindonian revelation a basic unity and a synoptic centre. What is it, then?

In brief, Sri Aurobindo felt that it is possible for man to advance yet further in the evolutionary race and reach a new dynamic status—that of the Supramental being. There is a lid of resistance barring the way, which is the veil of Maya, the semi-transparency of the mental consciousness, the para-adequacy of the so-called rational man. The lid has to be broken through, 'mind' instead of guiding us through a haze of half-lights and false-lights should link up with the secret ultimate source of Knowledge and Power, and achieve the glory of rebirth as Supermind, and take charge of the planning of the new world and also the execution of the plan. Then, and not till then, will our difficulties and frustrations cease; then, and not till then, will man be able to establish here a new heaven and a new earth, and enact for ever the drama of the Life Divine.

As we read *The Life Divine* today, we cannot but marvel how greatly it is planned and constructed notwithstanding the irritating circumstances of its original piecemeal publication over a period of years in a monthly magazine. There are two Volumes, each of twenty-eight chapters; but the second Volume is nearly three times as expansive as the first, and is itself divided into two Parts, each of fourteen chapters. Broadly speaking, then, there are three main sections, respectively entitled:

Vol. I: 'Omnipresent Reality and the Universe';

Vol. II, Part I: 'The Infinite Consciousness and the Ignorance'; and

Vol. II, Part II: 'The Knowledge and the Spiritual Evolution'.

What is the place of man-as-he-is in the universe? How has he come to occupy this place in omnipresent Reality? What is his ultimate goal? In a key passage in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

... we perceive that our existence is a sort of refraction of the divine existence, in inverted order of ascent and descent, thus ranged:

Existence
Consciousness-Force
Bliss
Supermind

Mind
Psyche (Soul)
Life
Matter.

The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of supermind into cosmic being; we ascend from Matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of supermind towards the divine being. The knot of the two, the higher and the lower hemispheres, is where mind and supermind meet with a veil between them. The rending of the veil is the condition of the divine life in humanity; for by that rending, by the illuminating descent of the higher into the nature of the lower being and the forceful ascent of the lower being into the nature of the higher, mind can recover its divine light in the all-comprehending supermind, the soul realize its divine self in the all-possessing all-blissful Ananda, life repossess its divine power in the play of omnipotent Conscious-Force, and matter open to its divine liberty as a form of the divine Existence.

Sachchidananda (Existence: Conscious-Force: Bliss) is the obverse; man-as-he-is in his terrestrial habitat is the reverse; and the transfiguration of the latter into the former is the whole aim of all spiritual endeavour. The one divine existence, having taken in terms of its capacity for mutable becoming an involutionary descent into the lower hemisphere of phenomenal life, the evolutionary ascent has now to re-achieve what is lost and return to the life divine. The *one* has become *many*; harmony has broken into a million discords; Truth has disintegrated into deceptive half-truths and falsehoods; immortality has derailed itself into death. If divine life is to return, these limitations have to be annulled:

... the absence or abolition of separatist egoism and of effective division in consciousness is the one essential condition of the divine Life, and therefore their presence in us is that which constitutes our mortality and our fall from the Divine. This is our 'original sin' . . . the deviation from the Truth and Right of the Spirit, from its oneness, integrality and harmony that was the necessary condition for the great plunge into the Ignorance which is the soul's adventure in the world and from which was born our suffering and aspiring humanity.

The question may be posed: Where was the *need*—where is the *justification*—for the 'descent', the involution, the play of the dualities in the phenomenal world? Even granted that there is a cure, where was the need—where is the justification—for the disease itself? Unable to formulate an easy answer to the question, the human mind is too often prone to deny either the One (the pure Spirit) or the many (the phenomenal world), thus giving rise to the two contrasting attitudes, the 'materialist denial' and the 'refusal of the ascetic'. While repudiating both exclusive attitudes, Sri Aurobindo nevertheless recognizes "the enormous, the indispensable utility of the very brief period of rationalistic Materialism through which humanity has been passing", as also the "still greater service rendered by Asceticism to Life". Modern materialism, in the main a Western phenomenon, has rendered a signal service to questing man by providing him with a considerable body of knowledge regarding the lower planes of existence, just as asceticism, in the main an Eastern and even peculiarly an Indian phenomenon, has served man by boldly adventuring into the Unknown and giving him intimations of the contours of the Spirit. And yet, as Sri Aurobindo urges, neither the revolt of matter against Spirit nor the revolt of Spirit against matter can yield a lasting harmony. We must, therefore, admit "both the claim of the pure Spirit to manifest in us its absolute freedom and the claim of universal Matter to be the mould and condition of our manifestation". The Materialist Denial is one version of Reality, while the Refusal of the Ascetic is its opposite version; but both are severely partial versions, and hence omnipresent Reality must include and exceed both of them, and still remain Itself, the One, the Real, the Vast:

We have therefore two fundamental facts of pure existence and of world existence, a fact of Being, a fact of Becoming. To deny one or the other is easy; to recognize the facts of consciousness and find out their relation is the true and fruitful wisdom.

Stability and movement ... are only our psychological representations of the Absolute, even as are oneness and multitude. The Absolute is beyond stability and movement as it is beyond unity and multiplicity. But it takes its eternal poise in the one and the stable and whirls round itself infinitely, inconceivably, securely in the moving and multitudinous. World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view; it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing.

'Mutable becoming' and 'immutable being' are both inherent in the divine play, even as storm and calm are both inherent in the life of the sea. The 'descent', the 'involution', the 'original sin', has occurred; the 'ascent', the 'evolution', the 'redemption', too has begun, and has been partly accomplished. It is the next crucial step—the leap from 'mind' to 'supermind'—that needs to be taken. The 'leap' is not to be understood as an athletic adventure on the physical plane; it is essentially a spiritual adventure. 'Beauty' is already hidden in the 'Beast'; he has to be released, that's all; or, rather, he has to release himself. Beauty has muffled itself in the Beast; and now the Beast has to unmuffle itself and be its true self, Beauty:

Man, the individual, has to become and to live as a universal being; his limited mental consciousness has to widen to the superconscient unity in which each embraces all; his narrow heart has to learn the infinite embrace and replace its lusts and discords by universal love and his restricted vital being to become equal to the whole shock of the universe upon it and capable of universal delight; his very physical being has to know itself as no separate entity but as one with and sustaining in itself the whole flow of the indivisible Force that is all things; his whole nature has to reproduce in the individual the unity, the harmony, the oneness-in-all of the supreme Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

This is typical of the Aurobindonian style in *The Life Divine* and the companion volumes: 'has to become', 'has to learn', 'has to know itself', 'has to reproduce' are the life-links in this system of analytical elaboration that gives the whole passage

(and similar passages) what J. A. Chadwick called a 'global' (or what, perhaps, may be even more appropriately called, a 'cosmic') sweep and rhythm. Man-as-he-is has to reach out and seize the held-out grapes of Possibility. But how? The answer is by cutting the knot of 'mind' and beyond-mind ('supermind'): by rending the veil separating the two hemispheres: by removing the golden lid that covers the Face of Possibility. "Knowledge", says Sri Aurobindo, "waits seated beyond mind and intellectual reasoning, throned in the luminous vast of illimitable self-vision". Just as Heidegger talks of 'care', 'finitude' and 'death' in connection with human *Dasein*, so also Sri Aurobindo names 'death', 'desire' and 'incapacity' as the badges of man-as-he-is. Yet the key to freedom, the secret of alchemy, the clue to transfiguration, is within ourselves:

The true soul secret in us—subliminal, we have said, but the word is misleading, for this presence is not situated below the threshold of waking mind, but rather burns in the temple of the inmost heart behind the thick screen of an ignorant mind, life and body, not subliminal but behind the veil,—this veiled psychic entity is the flame of the Godhead always alight within us, inextinguishable even by that dense unconsciousness of any spiritual self within which obscures our outward nature. It is a flame born out of the Divine and, luminous inhabitant of the Ignorance, grows in it till it is able to turn it towards the Knowledge. It is the concealed Witness and Control, the hidden Guide, the Daemon of Socrates, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine.

Awaken the true soul within: or, rather, remove the present obscuration, so that the soul's true flame may flood mind, life and body with the light of a new sensitiveness and charge them with a new receptivity to intimations from the higher hemisphere of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Supermind: this is the only way in which, even as Life and Mind have already been released in Matter, the greater powers of the concealed Godhead may also be released from the involution and their supreme Light may become permanently native to our terrestrial existence.

The two Parts of the second Volume of *The Life Divine*

address themselves to the task of explaining, firstly, how the 'descent' from the Infinite Consciousness to the Ignorance has come about, and, secondly, how the spiritual evolution has to proceed, step by step, till the ascent to where we fell from is accomplished, till the darkness, ignorance and death give place to Light, Knowledge and Immortality. At the outset we are faced by the paradox of the Infinite Consciousness, which is the creator of the world of phenomena, nevertheless permitting the play of Ignorance—the Ignorance that baffles us at every turn, checkmates us in every direction, and perverts our purposes and makes them seem awry and futile. Thus the 'cosmic paradox' is the spectacle of "an Infinite containing a mass of unexplained finites, an Indivisible full of endless divisions, and an Immutable teeming with mutations and differentiae". Can it be that this Ignorance is an independent power of Consciousness, even as Knowledge is, giving rise to "a Manichean double principle of conflicting and intermingling light and darkness, good and evil", stationed at the very root of cosmic existence? Sri Aurobindo dismisses this hypothesis, and would rather look upon the Ignorance as an obscured and emasculated form of the Knowledge:

...if we find that Knowledge and Ignorance are light and shadow of the same consciousness, that the beginning of Ignorance is a limitation of Knowledge, that it is the limitation that opens the door to a subordinate possibility of partial illusion and error, that this possibility takes full body after a purposeful plunge of Knowledge into a material Inconscience but that Knowledge too emerges along with an emerging Consciousness out of the Inconscience, then we can be sure that this fullness of Ignorance is by its own evolution changing back into a limited Knowledge and can feel the assurance that the limitation itself will be removed and the full truth of things become apparent, the cosmic Truth free itself from the cosmic Ignorance. In fact, what is happening is that the Ignorance is seeking and preparing to transform itself by a progressive illumination of its darkness into the Knowledge that is already concealed within it; the cosmic truth manifested in its real essence and figure would by that transformation reveal itself as essence and figure of the supreme omnipresent Reality.

Shall we say, then, that the crystal, having plunged into the water, has disappeared, become as it were one with the mud and the mire; but the solution can progressively purify itself, till

at last the crystals form again. Sri Aurobindo starts with what seems to be no more than a hypothetical statement (*if . . . then*), but presently clinches everything by beginning the very next sentence with, 'In fact. . .'. The hypothesis of the meta-physician is thus corroborated by the intuition and spiritual experience of the Yogi.

Still the question may be asked: Why must Knowledge crib itself into the shell of Ignorance? It comes to this: ignorance is really a form of narrowed or specialized knowledge, useful and reliable within limits, but dangerous and deceptive outside those limits. Nor is such limited knowledge a denial of integral Knowledge, except when we misuse such bits of specialized Knowledge:

This Ignorance is . . . really a power of the Knowledge to limit itself, to concentrate itself on the work in hand, an exclusive concentration in practice which does not prevent the full existence and working of the whole conscious being behind, but a working in the conditions chosen and self-imposed on the nature. All conscious self-limitation is a power for its special purpose, not a weakness. . . .

The Absolute is not really limited by putting forth in itself a cosmos of relations; it is the natural play of its absolute being, consciousness, force, self-delight . . . the Ignorance, considered as a power of manifoldly self-absorbed and self-limiting concentration of the conscious being, is a natural capacity of variation in his self-conscious knowledge, one of the possible poises of relation of the Absolute in its manifestation, of the Infinite in its series of finite workings, of the One in its self-enjoyment in the Many.

Thus Knowledge through limitation and isolation acquires the character of Ignorance, which in its turn facilitates a separative development of the consciousness, shutting us to the innermost as well as total truth of things, and driving us to "live in an apparent surface existence". (To a certain extent, living in the Knowledge and living in the Ignorance may be compared to the Heideggerian 'authentic' mode of standing-in, in which Dasein relates himself to things in terms of the totality of his affiliations, and the 'inauthentic' mode of standing-in, in which Dasein is so much engrossed in the demands of everyday life that he is content to relate himself to things in terms of limitation and particularity.) If the "lost herds" of Knowledge are to be re-

gained, there should start the counter-movement of return to integrality. To the task of describing this return or progress to integrality—this inner turn towards Knowledge—Sri Aurobindo devotes the second Part of the second Volume.

Sri Aurobindo defines the nature of the evolutionary process in a classic sentence that appears in the chapter on 'Ascent and Integration': "The principle of the process of evolution is a foundation, from that foundation an ascent, in that ascent a reversal of consciousness and, from the greater height and wideness gained, an action of change and new integration of the whole nature". The dialectic involves, first, a starting point: an ascent that inevitably meets with an answering response: and an integration of the two movements, which becomes a new starting point. This is the old dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis re-stated in Aurobindonian terms, and is explained in even clearer terms in the chapter on 'The Triple Transformation':

...the gulf between mind and supermind has to be bridged, the closed passages opened and roads of ascent and descent created where there is now a void and a silence. This can be done only by the triple transformation ... there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousness; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation,—there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.

The cardinal stress is on the supramental transformation: it is the electric charge that fuses two elements into a new chemical compound. "The whole radical change in the evolution from a basis of Ignorance to a basis of Knowledge", asserts Sri Aurobindo, "can only come by the intervention of the supramental Power and its direct action in earth-existence".

As regards the actual ascent from Mind to Supermind, it is by no means a macadamized road; in fact, our seemingly objective descriptions are no more than very hazy (and, perhaps,

deceptive) approximations to certain psychological movements and changes. Nevertheless these sign-posts are not without their value. The 'ascending possibilities' may be many, but the central fact about them all is the ascent itself, however striven for and achieved; nor can there be much essential difference between one stair and another, and hence to scrutinize one of them is really to grasp the principle underlying them all. Sri Aurobindo therefore proceeds to describe in considerable detail one such—perhaps an archetypal—stair of ascent:

...from the point of view of the ascent of consciousness from our mind upwards through a rising series of dynamic powers by which it can sublimates itself, the gradation can be resolved into a stairway of four main ascents, each with its high level of fulfilment. These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind and Intuition into Overmind and beyond it; there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis. . . . Each stage of this ascent is therefore a general, if not a total, conversion of the being into a new light and power of a greater existence.

The whole ascent, all the four main stages included, is summed up as a flight of Thought, almost as a lightning flash stretching across the sky, in *Thought the Paraclete*, already referred to at the close of the last talk. The description in *The Life Divine*, however, is far more detailed, and not a single relevant circumstance or qualification is omitted. Still the symbols and images of poetry are more effective—and on the whole more convincing—than the laborious tools of analytical reason. Thus we find Sri Aurobindo suddenly, and purposefully, calling upon poetic imagery to redress the balance of prose exposition:

The soul may still be described as a traveller and climber who presses towards his high goal by step on step, each of which he has to build up as an integer but most frequently redescend in order to rebuild and make sure of the supporting stair so that it may not crumble beneath him: but the evolution of the whole consciousness has rather the movement of an ascending ocean of Nature; it can be compared to a tide or a mounting flux, the leading fringe of which touches the higher degrees of a cliff or hill while the rest is still below. . . . Another image might be that of an army advancing

in columns which annexes new ground, while the main body is still behind in a territory overrun but too large to be effectively occupied, so that there has to be a frequent halt and partial return to the traversed areas for consolidation and assurance of the hold on the occupied country and assimilation of its people. A rapid conquest might be possible, but it would be of the nature of an encampment or a domination established in a foreign country; it would not be the assumption, total assimilation, integration needed for the entire supramental change.

From this it follows that the supramental transformation of an individual here, another there, cannot by itself or in itself establish a new heaven and a new earth. The transformation has, no doubt, to begin with the individual, but an individual, a personal, transmutation cannot help humanity, and cannot redeem the earth. The consummation that is to be desired is the supramentalized individual becoming verily "a centre and a sign for the establishment of the supramental Consciousness-Force as an overtly operative power in the terrestrial workings of Nature". It is a total change that is needed, not only the transformation of man into superman, but also the transmutation of Nature into Supernature, of this too too sullied earth into a blissful Heaven, an earthly Paradise. Here, too, as noted by Frederic Spiegelberg, there is a striking similarity between Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future and Heidegger's.

After quoting the line "But that which remains, is established by the poets" from Holderlin, Heidegger says (in his lecture on 'Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry', as translated by Douglas Scott):

Poetry is the act of establishing by the word and in the word. What is established in this manner? The permanent. But can the permanent be established then? Is it not that which has always been present? No! Even the permanent must be fixed so that it will not be carried away. . . . The poet names the gods and names all things in that which they are . . . when the poet speaks the essential word, the existent is by this naming nominated as what it is. So it becomes known as existent. Poetry is the establishing of being by means of the word.

Again, in an attempt to formulate the distinction between 'thinking' and 'poetizing', Heidegger says in the Postscript to his

lecture on 'What is Metaphysics?' (as translated by R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick):

Obedient to the voice of Being, thought seeks the Word through which the truth of Being may be expressed. . . . Out of long-guarded speechlessness and the careful clarification of the field thus cleared, comes the utterance of the thinker. Of like origin is the naming of the poet. But since like is only like insofar as difference allows, and since poetry and thinking are most purely alike in their care of the word, the two things are at the same time as opposite poles in their essence. The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy.

In a later essay, Heidegger went even further and said (as translated and quoted in Thomas Langan's *The Meaning of Heidegger*):

Thinking, however, is poetizing, and indeed not just a kind of poetizing in the sense of poetry or song. The thinking of Being is the fundamental manner of poetizing. . . . Thinking is the root-poetry from which all poesy follows, also all that is practical in art, in so far as art comes in its activity into the region of language. All poetizing in this very wide sense, and also in the narrow sense of poesy, is in its ground a thinking.

Essential or fundamental thinking (or poetizing in the wide sense indicated) takes the complementary forms of (1) *thinking* that utters Being, (2) *poetizing* that names the Holy, and (3) *thanking* that is a sacrificial offering through total devotion to Being with the aim of illuminating the essential truth of things. Philosophy and poetry and even prayer are thus only complementary—not contradictory—affirmations. Heidegger the philosopher found in Holderlin his perfect poetic counterpart, but Sri Aurobindo the philosopher had in himself—he evolved in himself—his own ideal poetic 'other half'. A reference has been made already to *Thought the Paraclete*. Likewise, taking his cue from the passage quoted earlier from *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo describes (in 'The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds' in *Savitri*) King Aswapathy "as a traveller and climber who presses towards his high goal step by step"; thus what is uttered in *The Life Divine* is named in *Savitri*, form is enriched with colour, body is infused with life. And in a poem like *Rose of*

God, which is a pure mystic cry of the soul, this triune capacity of the inspired word to *utter* Being, to *name* and to *thank* the Holy breaks out as a *mantric* prayer, rhythm and form and phrase and meaning coalescing perfectly into an utter and absolute harmony:

Rose of God, vermillion stain on the sapphires of heaven,
Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven!
Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
Passion-flower of the Nameless, but of the mystical Name.

Rose of God, great wisdom-bloom on the summits of being,
Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!
Live in the mind of our earthhood; O golden Mystery, flower,
Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous
Hour.

Rose of God, damask force of Infinity, red icon of might,
Rose of Power with thy diamond halo piercing the night!
Ablaze in the will of the mortal, design the wonder of thy
plan,
Image of Immortality, outbreak of the Godhead in man.

Rose of God, smitten purple with the incarnate divine Desire,
Rose of Life, crowded with petals, colour's lyre!
Transform the body of the mortal like a sweet and magical
rhyme;
Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless
the children of Time.

Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's
abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and Life Beatitude's
kiss.

As in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, in Sri Aurobindo's poetry too the 'Rose' is the supreme symbol of the essence and efflorescence of God. Bliss, Light, Power, Life, Love are the five essences that fuse as the integral perfection of God; and as these together bloom eternally as the Rose of God in Heaven, so should they "leap up in our heart of humanhood", "live in the mind of our earthhood" "ablaze in the will of the mortal", and so "make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss". The Holy has here been *named*: the very

petals of the Rose have been named. And the Rose should bloom *here*, for it is here on earth that the Life Divine should be enacted. Such is the central content of this incantation. Here is Being uttered and named and thanked and also invoked to have his dwelling *here*—here on earth, here in the human heart. A spell is cast over us, and we experience an accession of inner poise and strength.

Rose of God, then, is almost epiphanic in its action; the poem is vision, invocation and action all at once. In the two halves of each stanza, an aspect of the Glory that is eternally in bloom *there* is asked to blossom in *our* time and space; Being is asked to enact becoming. In the three middle stanzas, the higher Light, Power and Life are coaxed (or coerced) to unfold themselves in the mind of the earth, and in the will and body of the mortal. 'Our heart' in the first stanza is receptive to the intimations of Bliss; 'the heart of the yearning' in the last stanza enacts becoming out of the ache of love in Nature's abyss—the depths of matter from which alone all life leaps into existence. The 'Bliss' of the first stanza is Ahana the 'Dawn of God' who leans to the earth; the 'Love' of the last stanza is Savitri the creative mediatrix who raises earth to Heaven. It is one sphere really, part Bliss part Love, and together they contain the triune glory of Light-Power-Life.

In *Savitri* (Book VII, canto vii), the heroine journeys into the 'inner countries' in search of her true Self, and this realisation comes to her at last:

What seemed herself was an image of the Whole...
 She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,
 She was the red heart of the passion flower ...
 She was the godhead hid in the heart of man,
 She was the climbing of his soul to God.
 The cosmos flowered in her, she was its bed.

In Book XI, again, when Savitri is repeatedly—four times, in fact—offered personal Felicity in some far-off Heaven, she unhesitatingly answers every time:

Thy peace, O Lord, a boon within to keep
 Amid the roar and ruin of wild Time
 For the magnificent soul of man on earth ...

Thy oneness, Lord, in many approaching hearts ...

Thy energy, Lord, to seize on woman and man,
To take all things and creatures in their grief
And gather them into a mother's arms ...

Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe,
Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,
Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men.

Certainly, Savitri asks for His peace, His oneness, His energy, His joy—but not for herself. She wants them *for earth and men*; like Ganga coming to the parched earth from Heaven, the 'mystic Rose' too, the power and the glory, the bliss and the love, the oneness and the peace, should blossom *here*, here on earth, here among men. When Savitri elects firmly to remain *here*, when she so clearly articulates her aspiration on earth's and humanity's behalf, the appropriate Divine response follows:

I lay my hands upon thy soul of flame,
I lay my hands upon thy heart of love,
I yoke thee to my power of work in Time.
Because thou hast obeyed my timeless will,
Because thou hast chosen to share earth's struggle and fate
And leaned in pity over earth-bound men
And turned aside to help and yearned to save,
I bind by thy heart's passion thy heart to mine ...
O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light
And bring down God into the lives of men;
Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,
My garden of life to plant a seed divine.

This could almost be a poetic gloss on *Rose of God*, and indeed it would not be wide of the mark if we read the poem as a prefiguring of the revelation and spiritual action in the great epic, *Savitri*.

We have seen how Sri Aurobindo's speculations about the future of man and his world—speculations grounded largely on his own mystic experiences and Yogic realizations—led him to the conclusion that 'mind' will one day be, is perhaps being already though slowly, superseded by 'supermind' and that this supramental consciousness will in good time facilitate the creation here on earth of the home of a divinized humanity. But if man changed, with him must change also his social and political institutions, his arts, his poetry. In his prophetic treatise, *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo has tried to indicate the possible extended frontiers of the poetry of the supramental age. Poetry at its purest best has been described by Abbè Bremond as "a mystic incantation allied to prayer"; the Vedic or Upanishadic *mantra*, for example, had this peculiar potency, and often strikes us, half as a prayer from below, half as a whisper from above. If, then, poetry is quintessentially soul speaking to soul, it should leap over meddling middle terms like the analytical interpretative intellect and the sensory reflex reactions and succeed in communicating directly with the soul. Before the mechanism of the nerves or the senses starts translating the poet's images or before the intellect supervenes to dissociate the images, anatomize the sentences, or exercise itself in semantics, the poetic utterance must have achieved instantaneous communication, as a tune strikes the ear, as light embraces the object. Once the soul itself has been stirred to new life, the effects no doubt will be felt by the other instruments also and such poetry must suffuse the whole man with a new glow. For the creation of poetry with this elemental irresistible force, the poet needs an intensity of vision and sustained inspiration at the highest possible level. The real poetic word is no short-hand substitute for thought, it is in itself a spark of creative life,—indeed the

(poetic) Word is Brahman. When it falls, the soul seizes it as hospitable soil receives the seed, and the results can be incommensurable. When the *mantra* sinks in the receptive ear, says Sri Aurobindo,

Its message enters stirring the blind brain
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
The hearer understands a form of words
And, musing on the index thought it holds,
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
Then, falling silent in himself to know
He meets the deeper listening of his soul:
The Word repeated itself in rhythmic strains:
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
Are seized unalterably and he endures
An ecstasy and an immortal change;
He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,
All knowledge rushes on him like a sea:
Transmuted by the white spiritual ray
He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,
Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech . . .

Apart from the mere sound, the seeming 'sense', there is in poetry, and more especially in the kind of poetry that we are discussing, "the embodied truth", the creative seed; and this can be met only by "the deeper listening" of the soul.

Some of Aurobindo's own shorter lyrics—notably *Rose of God*, *Thought the Paraclete* and *The Bird of Fire*—may perhaps be cited as a foretaste of this future poetry. But how about the future epic? Aren't the days of the great epic gone for ever? We often think that the answer is in the affirmative, because we carry in our minds too narrow an image of the *Ramayana*, the *Iliad*, or the *Song of Roland*. But antiquity and anonymity mustn't alone be the deciding factor. To quote from *The Future Poetry*—

The epic is only the narrative presentation on its largest canvas and, at its highest elevation, greatness and amplitude of spirit and speech and movement. It is sometimes asserted that the epic is solely proper to primitive ages when the freshness of life made a story of large and simple action of supreme interest to the youthful mind of humanity. the literary epic an artificial prolongation by an intellectual age, and

a genuine epic poetry no longer possible now or in the future. This is to mistake form and circumstance for the central reality. The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or the gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action: the divinely appointed creation of Rome, the struggle of the principles of good and evil as presented in the great Indian poems, the pageant of the centuries or the journey of the seer through the three worlds beyond us are as fit themes as primitive war and adventure for the imagination of the epic creator. The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.

The *Aeneid*, the *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* are epics as incontestably as are the *Iliad*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Song of Roland*; and neither can we deny recognition to an epic like Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, notwithstanding its unconventionality, nor even 'prose epics' like Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or Proust's almost endless novel. Likewise, we have no right to rule out the epics of the soul where the action is not physical but spiritual, where the battle is fought, not on an earthly terrain, but on the high plateaus of the soul. There is 'static' drama in Maeterlinck's plays, in the *Book of Job*, in the epic of Harischandra's silent suffering for upholding Truth. Even Dante's and Milton's epics have ultimately to be interpreted in terms of psychic or psychological states or actions rather than in crudely physical terms.

As often with Aurobindo, having thus posited this new possibility in epic creation, he presently set out to realize it: he would himself see how far his speculations were capable of immediate realization. He must have begun *Savitri* in the Baroda period and cast it for the role of companion to *Urvashi*. But it was not completed,—at any rate it was not published. He took it up again in the twenties, after he had already published in the *Arya* the series of articles that have since assumed shape as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Future Poetry*. The revision, however, proceeded very slowly. And revision followed revision, certain parts undergoing ten or more revi-

sions, "each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry". In the thirties and forties, something like a final cast came to be made; "as it now stands", Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1936 to a correspondent, "there is a general Overmind influence, . . . sometimes coming fully through, sometimes colouring the poetry of the higher planes fused together, sometimes lifting any one of these higher planes to its highest or the psychic, poetic intelligence or vital towards them". Parts of the poem—a Canto here, a Canto there—were published during the forties, and presently the whole poem, first in a two-volume edition, and, in 1954, in the one-volume definitive edition.

In the form in which we now have it, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* is in three Parts, divided into 12 Books or 49 Cantos, making up a total of about 24,000 lines, being thus longer even than Browning's *The Ring and the Book* by some 3,000 lines. Of the projected 51 Cantos, the last in Book VII (The Book of Yoga) is without a title and is presumably incomplete, while the first two in Book VIII (The Book of Death) are missing—they weren't or couldn't be written. Although the epic is thus apparently incomplete, when one reads it at one spell (and what a long spell!), one is rather struck by the rounded fullness of the poem; one feels that nothing that could relevantly be said has been left unsaid. Almost fifty years a-growing, *Savitri* was shaped and reshaped in the fires of successive inspirations till it achieved at last an adequate splendour of revelation. As originally planned, *Savitri* was to have been a simple narrative poem in two Parts, the first with Earth for its scene of action and the second carrying the action "beyond" to the worlds of Night, Twilight, and Day, and concluding with the heroine calling down to this obscured and perverted world the purifying and transforming powers of Sachchidananda. In the final cast of the poem, the old *Mahabharata* story of Savitri and Satyavan has immeasurably gained in volume and purpose, and what is legendary integrally fuses with the symbolic and the material spirals into the realms of the Spirit, while the Spirit willingly suffers definition in terms of the material.

But why, it may be asked, the Savitri theme? It is not possible for the average Western reader to gauge the large space

the legend of Savitri fills in the Hindu's racial memory. With many episodes in the *Mahabharata* to choose from, both Toru Dutt and Romesh Chunder found the Savitri story irresistible. Even today women in India, whether wife or maid, perform certain mystic rites on a particular night in the name of Savitri, and they taste the nectarean hope that their present or future wedded life will be filled with fruitfulness and felicity. Savitri is symbolic of the true wife's devotion and power—unflinching devotion and power even to overcome the greatest of evils, Death. And Satyavan is Truth. Beauty, love and power (the power of devotion and chastity) allied to Truth can dare anything, achieve anything. Since Aurobindo's Yoga was a "world-transforming Yoga", since it assumed the possibility of mind being transformed into 'supermind', limited self-divided earth-nature being transcended by 'supernature' and earth-life by the life divine, he chose as the fit symbol hero and heroine of his epic of the evolving soul the immaculate Satyavan and Savitri, names already familiar to us, and charged with untold significance by association with the ancient Hindu scriptures and epics.

A brief analysis of the poem may now be attempted. Cantos I and II of Book I (The Book of Beginnings) plunge in *medias res* and open on "the day when Satyavan must die". Already "twelve passionate months" since the marriage of Savitri and Satyavan are over, and the fatal day has dawned. But it is also the "symbol dawn" of a new epoch in cosmic history. There is thus "double-time" in *Savitri*: although in the "legend" the poem comprises the events of a single day in temporal terms, in the "symbol" all time and all eternity are involved in the spiritual action. Like the "double-time", there is "double-action" also: on the material plane the poem begins on the day Satyavan is fated to die, and the poem ends with the resolution of the crisis, in other words the discomfiture of Yama the Lord of Death, and the return of Satyavan to life. On the spiritual plane, too, the poem plunges into the middle of things, the fateful hour in human history when the Asuric creation—shall we say, the Atomic Bomb?—threatens the world and all the great achievements of the race with total annihilation. Having reached the present crucial moment in the adventure of evolu-

tion, is there to be an advance—or only a relapse, a retreat, a slipping into the yawning abyss of extinction? Time was, time is—but how about time future? How is the issue between threatening Death and the hope of New Life to be worked out in future time? The issue is posed squarely in *The Life Divine* and a marvellous future Possibility is presented in the language of metaphysics. In *Savitri* the problem is posed again and the possibility presented again, but in terms of poetry. The great spiritual drama unfolded in *Savitri* is thus really played in the theatre of the human soul, for Asuric power can be countered, mastered and transformed only by spiritual power; and so the poem ends with the defeat of a “partial and temporary darkness of the Soul and Nature”. It is the prerogative of the awakened soul, acquiring a clear sense of direction and power and poise of movement, to tunnel through death-daunted Life and Time to the bliss everlasting at the far end. Even as Satyavan with Savitri's help lives down the invasion of Night and Twilight and emerges into the clear light of Day, the human soul too (which is the spearhead of the evolutionary advance), led by the Supreme's gift of Grace, overcomes the limitations of the Ignorance and the obscurities and contradictions of mental life, and achieves the bliss of divine or superconscient life.

In the opening Cantos, even as Savitri's predicament on the “fatal day” is presented, her special status, her divine origins, too are stressed—

To live with grief, to confront death on her road,—
The mortal's lot became the Immortal's share.
Thus trapped in the gin of earthly destinies,
Awaiting her ordeal's hour abode,
Outcast from her inborn felicity,
Accepting life's obscured terrestrial robe,
Hiding herself even from those she loved,
The godhead greater by a human fate.

The day has dawned as other days to all except Savitri; only she knows the struggle ahead, the battle that must be fought and won before the following dawn. Satyavan's impending death is but a link in an endless chain of thwarted purposings in this foul and flawed earth—

Pain with its lash, joy with its silver bribe
 Guard the Wheel's circling immobility,
 A bond is put on the high climbing mind,
 A seal on the too large wide-open heart;
 Death stays the journeying discoverer, Life.

And it is the burden of Savitri's destiny to "wrestle with the Shadow . . . and confront the riddle of man's birth and life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's night". She is Savitri the anxious, agonized wife, bearing the weight of an intolerable and frightful eventuality; but she is also—and she knows it too—the great World-Mother. The human and the divine are locked in her in an intimate, ineffable embrace. Hence she faces the future with surface anxiety and also with a deep quietude and self-mastery. The readiness is all,—

Whether to bear with Ignorance and Death
 Or hew the ways of Immortality,
 To win or lose the godlike game for man,
 Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's dice.

How does it happen that a mere girl has become thus the vessel of the immortal spirit? The answer is elaborated in the three remaining Cantos of Book I, and the whole of Book II (The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds) and Book III (The Book of the Divine Mother). In the *Mahabharata* story, King Aswapathy, being childless, undergoes austerities till he is promised a daughter. But in the Aurobindonian version, Aswapathy is no mere childless King desiring increase, he is rather, in Mr. A. B. Purani's words, "the aspiring human soul down the millenniums of evolution in his search for the truth of himself, of the world and of God". Aswapathy is really what *Homo Sapiens* is after all the countless ages of evolution, and what he hopes to be in the highest flights of his imaginative striving and in his noblest aspirations and speculations; and so Aswapathy's Yoga truly becomes "an epic climb of the human soul in its journey from the inconscient to the very gates of the Super-conscient". Canto III begins succinctly: "A world's desire compelled her mortal birth"—Aswapathy being both himself and the world, and his prolonged *tapas* having for its aim, not

his own salvation alone, nor that particularly, but rather the releasing of humanity and the world from the revolving chariot wheel of frustration, and taking them to the far heights of the Life Divine. The description of Aswapathy's Yoga or trance of seeking takes up about 370 pages—almost one-half of the whole poem. Book II especially, spread over 15 Cantos, is the one major piece de resistance in *Savitri* and extends to nearly 250 pages. The main lines of the argument, however, are clear enough, and may be stated in Aurobindo's own words—

Aswapathy's Yoga falls into three parts. First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as the individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness, and this is described in the Second Book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realization and new creation. That is described in the Book of the Divine Mother.

Starting as a mental being Aswapathy wings higher and higher till his soul achieves release from his earlier bonds and is in a condition to receive the Secret Knowledge:

Thus came his soul's release from Ignorance,
His mind and body's first spiritual change.
A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,
A new world-knowledge broadened from within.

Now the Secret Knowledge itself is described in Canto IV. It is a series of flashes, wide-reaching all-transfiguring illuminations, and as the Knowledge grows into him, the human mould breaks, he is clothed with new raiment, and acquires new eyes, new ears; he sees the cosmic drama of involution and evolution, the *lila* of God descending into clay and clay aspiring to godhead; and the mystery of world-existence is a mystery no more—

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
 Has entered with his silence into space:
 He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;
 He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;
 Space is himself and Time is only he. . .
 A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
 His nature we must put on as he put ours;
 We are sons of God and must be even as he:
 His human portion, we must grow divine.
 Our life is a paradox with God for key.

Released from bondage and charged with this Secret Knowledge,
 the soul achieves a complete spiritual transformation. Ascent
 and descent meet in close embrace and a new luminous stability
 and strength is forged—

In a divine retreat from mortal thought,
 In a prodigious gesture of soul-sight,
 His being towered into pathless heights,
 Naked of its vesture of humanity.
 As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
 A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
 A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
 A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
 Enveloped him. . .
 An Omniscient knowing without sight or thought,
 An indecipherable Omnipotence,
 A mystic Form that could contain the worlds,
 Yet make one human breast its passionate shrine,
 Drew him out of his seeking loneliness
 Into the magnitudes of God's embrace.

Having thus solved his personal problem as an individual,
 Aswapathy projects himself as King or representative man, and
 makes a new ascent as the pioneer Traveller of the Worlds,
 the leader and path-finder of the race:

He travelled in his mute and single strength
 Bearing the burden of the world's desire. . .
 World after world disclosed its guarded powers,
 Heaven after heaven its deep beatitudes,
 But still the invisible Magnet drew his soul.

The subconscious, the mental, the superconscious and all the

intermediate worlds are traversed, and aeons are gathered, summed up or anticipated during this extraordinary vigil of Aswapathy's Yoga. In the end Aswapathy finds himself flooded by a primordial energy—the Consciousness-Force of the Divine Mother:

Overwhelmed by her implacable light and bliss,
An atom of her illimitable self
Mastered by the honey and lightning of her power,
Tossed towards the shores of her ocean ecstasy,
Drunk with a deep golden spiritual wine,
He cast from the rent stillness of his soul
A cry of adoration and desire . . .
He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone.

Returning to consciousness, he faces the Divine Mother and makes a passionate appeal on behalf of the star-crossed race of man—

How shall I rest content with mortal days
And the dull measure of terrestrial things,
I who have seen behind the cosmic mask
The glory and the beauty of thy face? . . .
A foiled immortal soul in perishing limbs,
Baffled and beaten back we labour still;
Annulled, frustrated, spent, we still survive. . .
Let thy infinity in one body live,
All-Knowledge wrap one mind in seas of light,
All-Love throb single in one human heart. . .
Let a great word be spoken from the heights
And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.

And the Divine Mother answers—

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.
One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power. . .
Beauty shall walk celestial on the earth,
Delight shall sleep in the cloud-net of her hair
And in her body as on his homing tree
Immortal Love shall beat his glorious wings. . .
A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.

With Part II (Book IV), we come to the human story; the promise has been given to Aswapathy, and the fulfilment begins. We pass from the Canto describing the Birth and Childhood of the Flame, to the Cantos where we watch Savitri's immaculate progress from girlhood to the glorious dawn of adolescence and love. Once when Aswapathy is lost in introspection, Savitri approaches him "like a shining answer from the gods". He is taken aback by the splendour of her beauty:

There came the gift of a revealing hour. . .
 A deathless meaning filled her mortal limbs;
 As in a golden vase's poignant line
 They seemed to carry the rhythmic sob of bliss
 Of nature's mute adoration towards heaven
 Released in beauty's cry of living form
 Towards the perfection of eternal things.
 Transparent grown the ephemeral living dress
 Bared the expressive deity to his view.

The word comes to him, and he tells her that she is not meant to be "a star alone". He accordingly asks her to go out into the world and decide for herself:

Depart where love and destiny call your charm.
 Venture through the deep world to find thy mate.
 For somewhere on the longing breast of earth,
 Thy unknown lover waits for thee the unknown.
 Thy soul has strength and needs no other guide
 Than One who burns within thy bosom's powers.

Her search is long, but at last her wandering feet lead her to the hermitage where young Satyavan is in attendance on his blind aged parents, King Dyumathsena and his Queen, now deprived of their throne. Savitri and Satyavan meet in sudden felicity and recognize the hand of fate:

Her rapid fingers taught a flower song,
 The stanzued movement of a marriage hymn.
 Profound in perfume and immersed in hue
 They mixed their yearning's coloured signs and made
 The bloom of their purity and passion one.
 A sacrament of joy in treasuring palms.

She brought, flower-symbol of her offered life. . .
Thus were they in each other lost awhile,
Then drawing back from their long ecstasy's trance
Came into a new self and a new world.

Returning to her father, Savitri is about to report her joy. Her face is transfigured by happiness and Narad himself, the divine Sage, thrills with wonder and asks—

Who is this that comes, the bride,
The flame-born, and round her illumined head
Pouring their lights her hymeneal pomps
Move flashing about her? From what green glimmer of
glades
Retreating into dewy silences
Or half-seen verge of waters moon-betrayed
Bringst thou this glory of enchanted eyes?

Savitri now speaks about Satyavan, and Narad's face falls; pointedly questioned, he praises Satyavan's manifold perfections but adds that he is fated to die a year hence. Savitri, however, is undaunted:

Once my heart chose and chooses not again. . .
Death's grip can break our bodies, not our souls;
If death take him, I too know how to die.
Let fate do with me what she will or can;
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;
My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me
Helpless against my immortality.

Her mother's worldly wisdom also fails to affect Savitri's decision. If it be only for a year, she will still accept this joy, but it will not be for a mere twelve months, for she can dimly see her real self and Satyavan's true self, and she knows that this threatening shadow can be met and chased away. It is now Narad's occupation, having raised the hideous doubt, to argue it away; he too sees wondrous possibilities being realized as the result of Savitri's adamant will. So Narad assures Aswapathy and the Queen that all will be well, and they must hope and believe. Savitri is not as other women, she is cast for a uniquely cosmic role of struggle and redemption—

A day must come when she must stand unhelped
 On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
 Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
 Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
 To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge.
 Alone with death and close to extinction's edge,
 Her single greatness in that last dire scene,
 She must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
 And reach an apex of world-destiny
 Where all is won or all is lost for man.

Book VII (The Book of Yoga) begins with a description of the wedded love of Satyavan and Savitri. But the joy of the union is marred, so far as Savitri is concerned, by her foreknowledge of Satyavan's approaching death and the consequent ache in her heart. Savitri the incarnation of the Divine Mother is nevertheless a limited human being in appearance; her surface human reactions, however, do not really belie the veiled divinity in her heart. She is the golden fruit of Aswapathy's Yoga, and she herself becomes a Yogin, determined to know herself fully and realize her strength completely, and to be in readiness for the coming trial. She looks inward, tears off veil after veil of blinding appearance, rejects the pale or coloured reflections that claim to be the self, passes by the Mother of Sorrows, the Madonna of Might and the Mother of Light, turns away from both the emphatic Denials and the arrogant Affirmations, till at last her purposive divinity achieves full efflorescence and she sees in a flash the whole arc of her terrestrial mission. If Aswapathy is Aspiration, Savitri is both the Response and the resulting Transformation—at once the individual transformation of an elected Person and the promise of the total transformation of earth and earth-nature. As Mr. Purani puts it, "Aswapathy maintains throughout the position of the witness, Savitri carries out the Divine dynamis. Aswapathy sees the Vision of the Supreme, Savitri brings down the Fire". And both Aswapathy and Savitri, in their aspiration and transforming spiritual action, strive, not for themselves alone but for all, for a general liberation, a universal realization and a splendorous new creation.

We return to the fatal day. Savitri's Yoga has armed her with vision and strength, and she accompanies Satyavan to the forest.

When the preordained hour arrives, Satyavan cries out her name and falls as one dead:

She knew that visible Death was standing there
And Satyavan had passed from her embrace.

Part III (Books IX-XI) details the protracted struggle between Savitri and Yama for the soul of Satyavan. On the eve of his Great Illumination under the Bodhi Tree, Siddharta too fought Mara and his followers; Jesus likewise resisted in the desert the subtle blandishments of Satan; and Job saved himself from his well-meaning worldly-wise friends. Savitri's is a similar ordeal, though, being the struggle of a woman and a wife with a power like Yama, it is more excruciatingly tense and vivid, and carries us to the supremest heights of Victory,—Victory over Death, and Love the Victor, and Truth the fruit of Victory.

Yama's phantom appearance is fearful as well as beautiful; death-giver though he is, still is he a god—

Something stood there, unearthly, sombre, grand,
A limitless denial of all being
That wore the terror and wonder of a shape.
In its appalling eyes the tenebrous Form
Bore the deep pity of destroying gods...
His shape was nothingness made real, his limbs
Were monuments of transience and beneath
Brows of unwearying calm large godlike lids
Silent beheld the writhing serpent, life.

In the ensuing trial of strength—a trial in which a variety of mind-forces and soul-forces are engaged—we have some of the features of the *Mahabharata* war. We are treated to a *Gita*, we are overwhelmed by a *Visvarupa* (a cosmic Vision), we are made to follow the vicissitudes of a Kurukshetra; we catch glimpses of Death's Other Kingdom, the Hedonist's Bower of Bliss, the paradisaical splendours of Vaikuntha (Heaven), the ineffable Void of Nirvana.

Savitri's ordeal takes her through the symbol worlds of 'eternal Night' with its oppressive load of evil (pain, death) and 'the double Twilight' with its somnolence and sophistry (hedonism, scepticism). Every argument addressed, every inducement

offered, to Savitri to make her give up her demand for the restoration of Satyavan's life is rebutted firmly or rejected resolutely:

Thus with armed speech the great opponents strove.
Around those spirits in the glittering mist
A deepening half-light fled with pearly wings
As if to reach some far ideal Morn.

But who is she, this Savitri, that she should dare to stand up thus to a god, to 'almighty' Death? Half in dread half in exasperation he says:

Show me the body of the living Truth
Or draw for me the outline of her face
That I too may obey and worship her.
Then will I give thee back thy Satyavan. . .

Again:

Who then art thou hiding in human guise? . . .
Reveal thy power, lay bare thy spirit's force,
Then will I give back to thee Satyavan.

Savitri has now no option but to assume her cosmic form, her *Visvarupa*:

A mighty transformation came on her. . .
In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil. . .
Eternity looked into the eyes of Death.

Even now, when she demands that "the soul of the world called Satyavan" should be forthwith freed from his clutch, Death tries to make a last-ditch stand, though in vain. This is the climactic moment in the spiritual action of the epic when Love faces Death, Light charges against Night. And Death is worsted, and flees from this symbol field of Kurukshetra:

The two opposed each other face to face.
His being like a huge fort of darkness towered;
Around it her life grew, an ocean's siege.
Awhile the Shade survived defying Heaven. . .

Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,
 Light was a luminous torture in his heart,
 Light coursed, a splendid agony, through his nerves;
 His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze. . .
 He called to Night but she fell shuddering back,
 He called to Hell but sullenly it retired:
 He turned to the Inconscient for support,
 From which he was born, his vast sustaining self:
 It drew him back towards boundless vacancy
 As if by himself to swallow up himself: . . .
 His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.
 At last he knew defeat inevitable. . .
 In the dream twilight of that symbol world
 The dire universal Shadow disappeared
 Vanishing into the Void from which it came...
 And Satyavan and Savitri were alone.

But for Savitri herself, the human-divine darling of Satyavan, the trial is not over yet. She has to face still the temptations in the symbol realm of 'everlasting Day'. Satyavan in no doubt won back, but why return to the earth? Why not enjoy paradisaical felicity for ever? In the alternative, why not opt for the utter peace of dissolution and annihilation in Nirvana? But Savitri is not to be deflected from her purpose. Earth, earth alone, will be the scene of her strivings, the field of her realizations:

In vain thou temptest with solitary bliss
 Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;
 My soul and his indissolubly linked
 In the one task. . .
 To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
 To change the earthly life to life divine.

Savitri will accept neither "solitary bliss" in some remote Elysium nor "an immense extinction in Eternity". Rather will she, with Satyavan by her side, return to the earth, and build *there* the bliss of Heaven. And so the transfiguring Word of release and benediction comes to her at last:

Descend to life with him thy heart desires. . .
 The frontiers of Ignorance shall recede,
 More and more souls shall enter into light,

Minds lit, inspired, the occult summoner hear
 And lives blaze with a sudden inner flame
 And hearts grow enamoured of divine delight
 And human wills tune to the divine will. . .
 A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
 And take the charge of breath and speech and act
 And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
 And every feeling a celestial thrill. . .
 Thus shall the earth open to divinity
 And common natures feel the wide uplift,
 Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray
 And meet the deity in common things.
 Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
 The Spirit shall take up the human play,
 This earthly life become the life divine.

But the conclusion of the story—being the conclusion of a Legend and a Symbol, not of an action in historic time—is for us still a conclusion yet to be concluded. We are bewildered, even as Satyavan is bewildered, but we are also content to exclaim like Satyavan with a feeling of peace and a deep sense of fulfilment that Savitri is the cause of all, with her enchantments she has twined us round! The fateful day has surpassed its fate, and concluded in the usual night—

Night, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven
 In silver peace, possessed her luminous reign.
 She brooded through her stillness on a thought
 Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
 And in her bosom nursed a greater Dawn.

And that is the end of *Savitri*. What is so striking about this epic is its sheer sweep, its amazing modernity, its pervasive mystical quality and its singular poetic power. Sri Aurobindo has imposed his empire on all knowledges and spiritual disciplines, and it is not surprising that we catch echoes—echoes that become new voices—or mark parallels—parallels that merge in the womb of Truth at infinity's distance. The three Parts of *Savitri* are respectively the Aurobindonian versions of the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Wide comprehension is the distinguishing mark of all epics, and in *Savitri* this comprehension is seen in its encyclopaedic grasp of

the totality of human experience and knowledge, ranging from the intuitions of the Vedic Rishis to the scientific discoveries and inventions of our own day. The striking modernity of *Savitri* is thus a function of its acute awareness of the contemporary situation in the physical and biological sciences, in the fields of philosophy and psychology, and in the regions of the humane arts; but all is integrally related to the double-action and double-time of the poem so that, in the final accounting, *Savitri* is neither an overflow of tradition nor an eruption of 'modernism' but a recordation in poetic terms of the ends and means determining man's and the earth's ultimate destiny set in the background of cosmic time.

In a sense, *Savitri* is *The Life Divine* turned into poetry, even as the *Divine Comedy* is Catholic theology and the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas given a poetic body. Nevertheless it needs to be reiterated that *Savitri* and the *Divine Comedy* are significant poetry, not mere philosophy or theology dressed up in poetical fripperies. The background philosophy, like any informed commentary, may help the reader to wind his way towards the central meaning of the poem; yet to explain the philosophy or make philological notes or scan the lines is not to seize the whole meaning of the poem. Rather the reader has to train himself to respond to the dynamics of mystic poetry so that he may be able to leap from the symbol to the truth behind it, keep steady pace with the cataract of images, and feel the thrill of each splash of revelation as it comes.

In 1932, Sri Aurobindo said that *Savitri* was "an attempt to catch something of the Upanishadic and Kalidasian movement, so far as that is possible in English", even as in *Iliad*, his other epic, he tried to catch the Homeric movement. The iambic blank verse of *Savitri* dispenses with the complicated structure of the Miltonic blank verse paragraph, and rather builds each line itself as a sparkling and almost self-sufficient unity, like a series of bricks piled one above the other to rear a gigantic building. Even so, as the *Poetry Review* remarked, in total impact Sri Aurobindo's blank verse is Miltonic. Just as the *anushtup* in Valmiki's hands proved a fit vehicle for the immortal strains of the *Ramayana*, so too this new-forged iambic line, each line by itself "in its own mass and force",—metallic in its finish and

clarity and capable of wondrous delicate handling at the hands of a Master,—has served Aurobindo's purpose admirably. It is too much to expect that an entire epic can be written at the white heat of poetic frenzy, but the Overhead inspiration is frequent enough—and for reasonably long spells—in such triumphant evidence that we are fully justified in hailing *Savitri* with its incandescent light of knowledge, its vast reserves of controlled energy and its superb rhythms of creative life as verily “a flame from the earth and yet the heavenly messenger of the Immortals”. To conclude in the words of Professor Raymond Frank Piper—

We know that we must resort to the art of poetry for expressing, to the fullest possible artistic limits, the yearning and battles of mankind for eternal life. And fortunately a tremendous new body of metaphysical and mystical poetry has already inaugurated the new Age of Illumination. . . . During a period of nearly fifty years before his passing in 1950, he (Aurobindo) created what is probably the greatest epic in the English language I venture the judgement that it is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful, and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth's darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence, and metaphorical brilliance.

Savitri is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute.

Sarojini Naidu

Like Tagore and Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu too was more than a poet; she was one of Mother India's most gifted children, readily sharing her burden of pain, fiercely articulating her agonies and hopes, and gallantly striving to redeem the Mother and redeem the time. It was as an English poet Sarojini Naidu first caught the attention of the public, but that was only the beginning. In course of time the patriot exceeded the poet, and Sarojini Naidu came to occupy some of the highest unofficial and official positions in the public life of India.

While it would perhaps be unwise to talk about her poetry without reference to her life, it would be no less unwise to talk at length about her life. Once she wrote to me: "Certainly, you have my blessings for writing about me and for quoting from my letters. But do you know much about me? So few even among those most intimate with me know little more than the bare facts and dates of my life". What really matters to a student of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is her "inner life", and this is largely a closed book to us. The "outer life" is for all to see, and—as a last resort—one starts guessing, which can be both fascinating and perilous!

Fifty-five years ago, when Sarojini Naidu made a trip to England in search of health, there took place between her and the great nationalist leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, this extraordinary conversation:

Gokhale: Do you know, I feel that an abiding sadness underlies all that unfailing brightness of yours? Is it because you have come so near death that its shadows still cling to you?

Mrs. Naidu: No, I have come so near life that its fires have burnt me.

Indeed, her whole life had been a battle and a struggle: she had to fight without remission the battle of her health, losing

and winning and losing again; and she had to struggle long against the bludgeonings of circumstance, neither wincing nor crying aloud. Sunniness and sadness, life and death, victory and defeat—early they set up their joint sceptre in her life, in her soul. As she cracked her jokes sparing none, the company invariably exploded in laughter; but how could they guess what was passing in the obscure infinities of her heart?

The girl Sarojini had been almost as tragically and radiantly wedded to pain and ecstasy as the wife and mother of a later day. "All the life of the tiny figure", wrote Mr. Arthur Symonds picturing Sarojini at the age of seventeen, "seemed to concentrate itself in the eyes: they turned towards beauty as the sunflower turns towards the sun. . . . Her body was never without suffering, or her head without conflict: but neither the body's weakness nor the heart's violence could disturb that fixed contemplation. . . ." The eldest daughter (she was born on 13 February 1879) of a father who was a scientist-dreamer and a mystic-jester and of a mother who was half-angel half-bird, Sarojini Chattopadhyaya had commenced life at colourful Hyderabad in the most auspicious surroundings. A wide-eyed wonder-drunk childhood had slowly ripened into a girlhood of immeasurable potency and promise. At twelve she had passed the Matriculation, at thirteen she had composed an English narrative poem of about 2000 lines. And at fifteen she had glimpsed the Vision of Love, she had fallen madly in love with the young Dr. Naidu; she *would* marry him, so her trembling lips had affirmed, and would brook no argument. What were the parents to do? Permit the marriage, in defiance of caste and regional prejudices (Sarojini's parents were Bengali Chattopadhyayas, the young man was an Andhra and a Naidu)? It was not to be thought of—and, besides, Sarojini was too young to marry, she was hardly more than a child, in fact! And so the distracted unhappy parents promptly shipped her off to England with a scholarship from the Nizam, hoping that the change of scene and the ardours of study would cure her of her violent insane passion. But they had reckoned without Sarojini's fiery-souled stubbornness, her great-hearted adamant resolution. No wonder she struck Symonds in the way she did, no wonder he felt that "this child had already lived through

all a woman's life". The Vision of Love that had come so early to her in all its aching magnificence was not to be blotted out; other Visions—the Vision of Faith, the Vision of the Mother, the Vision of Patriotism, the Vision of India the Mother—might come later in their turn at the appropriate time; but, for the time being, Love filled the horizon of her consciousness. If, however, England did nothing to blur the Vision or displace it by another, it was nevertheless her English interlude—her impressionable student days at King's College, London, and Girton College, Cambridge, and her early affiliations with Arthur Symonds, Edmund Gosse, and some of the members of the Rhymers' Club—that helped her to acquire the verbal and technical accomplishment, the mastery of phrase and rhythm, without which she could not have translated her visions and experiences into melodious poetry.

She had some pertinent counsel, too, from her friend Mr. Gosse. After reading her first poetical effusions, he felt that while she had no doubt a true poet's sensibility, she had been exercising it in a barren unprofitable way: "I implored her to consider that from an Indian of extreme sensibility, who had mastered not merely the language but the prosody of the West, what we wished to receive was, not a rechauffe of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul". It is fatally easy to lay too much stress on Gosse's advice. It is not always true that an Indian cannot write sensitively about robins and skylarks or about the English landscape—there is the poetry of Manmohan Ghose, for example, to prove that the feat is not impossible of accomplishment. All that we can ask is that the poet should indent on his own experience, not draw upon hearsay, and preserve a steadiness and intensity of vision without making compromises to mere convention. Besides, as regards the elemental emotions and passions that rock the human heart, they are the same everywhere. Nevertheless, in the given circumstances, there was point and urgency in Gosse's advice, and Sarojini was wise and resourceful enough to profit

by it. She decided she would make a fresh start as a poet, and turned her mind inward as well as homeward.

Returning to India in September 1898, Sarojini Chattopadhyaya became, before the year was out, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu—enacting (within limits) the role of an Indian Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The girl had become a wife, and she now readily surrendered herself to Love's consuming excess and Motherhood's privileged pains and joys. In quick succession were born Jayasurya, Padmaja, Ranadheera, and Lilamani to whom she addressed bright benedictory verses—

Golden sun of victory, born
In my life's unclouded morn
In my lambent sky of love. . .
Sun of victory, may you be
Sun of song and liberty.

Lotus-maiden, you who claim
All the sweetness of your name,
Lakshmi, fortune's queen, defend you. . .
Lotus-maiden, may you be
Fragrant of all ecstasy.

Lord of battle, hail
In your newly-tempered mail!
Learn to conquer, learn to fight
In the foremost flanks of right,
Like Valmiki's heroes bold,
Rubies girt in epic gold. . .

Limpid jewel of delight
Severed from the tender night
Of your sheltering mother-mine,
Leap and sparkle, dance and shine,
Blithely and securely set
In love's magic coronet. . .

The roses of Dawn presently gave place to the stinging rays of the rising Sun; high-vaulting hopes flamed like rockets, swirled aloft in their dizzy eminence, and suddenly dashed upon the earth. But let Mrs. Naidu tell the story in her own bitter-sweet words—

So the ardent years of her childhood had fled away in one swift flame of aspiration: and the lyric child had grown into the lyric

woman. All the instincts of her awakening womanhood for the intoxication of love and the joy of life were deeply interfused with the more urgent and intimate need of the poet-soul for a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision, its subtle and inexpressible thought. . .

And the dreamer so insatiable for immortality, who was a woman full of tender mortal wants, wept bitterly for her unfulfilled inheritance of joy.

Must joy lure one with its soap-bubble brilliance and crash in its fragility at the very first touch? Must love die of its own satiety? Must one's soul be

bent low with the pain
And the burden of love like the grace
Of a flower that is smitten with rain?

As Keats moaned, Aye, at the very Temple of Delight "veiled Melancholy hath her sovran shrine". Life is indeed a shot-silk pattern of tears and laughter, agony and ecstasy; and so Mrs. Naidu gently insinuated the warning—

Children, ye have not lived, to you it seems
Life is a lovely stalactite of dreams,
Or carnival of careless joys. . .

Children, ye have not lived, ye but exist
Till some resistless hour shall rise and move
Your hearts to wake and hunger after love
And thirst with passionate longings for the things
That burn your brows with blood-red sufferings.

Till ye have battled with great grief and fears,
And borne the conflict of dream-shattering years,
Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,
Children, ye have not lived: for this is life.

Mrs. Naidu, however, was not the woman to give way altogether to gnawing regrets or paralysing despair. She was still largely a creature of emotion and memory who sensed beauty in colour and odour and song and movement. The panorama of India's ageless life fascinated her without end. Hard labour is the lot of the masses in India, but what has made this life bearable—and occasionally even enjoyable—is the stimulus given

by songs and jokes and rhythmic movements. In some of her early poems Sarojini Naidu has tried to catch and reproduce in English the lilt and atmosphere of some of these folk-songs. Thus the Palanquin-Bearers—

Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
 She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
 She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
 She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream,
 Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
 We bear her along like a pearl on a string...

Thus the Wandering-Singers—

Our lays are of cities whose lustre is shed,
 The laughter and beauty of women long dead;
 The sword of old battles, the crown of old kings,
 And happy and simple and sorrowful things...

And the Indian Weavers sing that, at break of day, they weave the robes of a new-born child, at fall of night a queen's marriage-veils, and, in the moonlight chill, "a dead man's funeral shroud". How succinctly is human life summarized here! The song of the Coromandel Fishers has a more sinuous long-drawn quality appropriate to the theme—

Sweet is the shade of the coconut glade, and the scent of the
 mango grove,
 And sweet are the sands at the full o' the moon with the sound
 of the voices we love.
 But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and the dance
 of the wild foam's glee:
 Row, brothers, row to the blue of the verge, where the low
 sky mates with the sea.

The appositeness of the sentiments and imagery and the perfect management of the rhythm and the internal and terminal rhymes have made this song of three stanzas one of the most popular of Sarojini Naidu's poems. And so, with the Snake-Charmer, the Corn-Grinders, the Indian Dancers and the Bangle-Sellers. No room for obscurity or profundity here; simplicity and directness are sovereign, and the appeal is the appeal of the old, the unfading, the undying.

Nature too attracted Sarojini Naidu, and she sang in praise of Henna—

But, for lily-like fingers and feet,
The red, the red of the henna-tree—

and of harvest-sights and warbling birds and nightfall in her city, of nasturtiums and lotus lilies and champak blossoms. She also dived into history and legend and rescued pearls of great price and set them on the glistening foil of her poetry. "Humayun to Zobeida", though an adaptation from the Urdu, is excellent in its kind—

You flaunt your beauty in the rose, your glory in the dawn,
Your sweetness in the nightingale, your whiteness in the swan.
You haunt my waking like a dream...
Yet, when I crave of you, my sweet, one tender moment's
 grace,
You cry, "*I sit behind the veil, I cannot show my face*"...
What war is this of *Thee* and *Me*? Give o'er the wanton
 strife,
You are the heart within my heart, the life within my life.

Or this from the Persian, Princess Zeb-un-nissa singing in praise of her own beauty, the last of three beautiful stanzas—

And, when I pause, still groves among,
(Such loveliness is mine) a throng
 Of nightingales awake and strain
Their souls into a quivering song.

And always she seemed to sing as birds do, with scarce an effort; but occasionally she also touched her songs with something of the "still sad music of humanity, not harsh nor grating, though of ample power to chasten and subdue". Fresh-firecoal glints, the light in the shade, the spots on the Sun,—she uncannily sensed them, and not seldom she shot a revealing light on hidden or half-hidden essences, or, in Mr. K. D. Sethna's phrase, on "realities not quite of the earth earthy". She could sum up tragedy in two pitiless lines—

Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eye from tears?

She could galvanize into life with the power of her words the swaying and the heaving, the flush and the fire, of the Indian Dancers—

The scents of red roses and sandalwood flutter and die in the
maze of their gem-tangled hair,
And smiles are entwining like magical serpents the poppies of
lips that are opiate sweet. . .
Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging like
blossoms that bend to the breezes or showers,
Now wantonly winding, they flash, now they falter, and,
lingering, languish in radiant choir;
Their jewel-girt arms and warm, wavering, lily-long fingers
enchant through melodious hours,
Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate
bosoms aflame with fire?

But the most notable of her early poems was 'To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus', in which the fever of regret and the fervour of longing fused at last into marble strength and mystic rapture—

For us the travail and the heat,
The broken secrets of our pride,
The strenuous lessons of defeat,
The flower deferred, the fruit denied;
But not the peace, supremely won,
Lord Buddha, of thy Lotus-throne.

With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Diviner summits to attain,
With faith that sinks and feet that tire. . .
How shall we reach the great, unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus-throne?

The Golden Threshold, Sarojini Naidu's first collection of poems, came out in 1905. The papers were enthusiastic. "This little volume should silence for ever the scoffer who declares that women cannot write poetry", so wrote *the Review of Reviews*; "Her poetry seems to sing itself as if her swift thoughts

and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves", cooed *The Times*; and the *Glasgow Herald* made an important point: "The pictures are of the East it is true: but there is something fundamentally human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of East or West". As a poet, then, Sarojini Naidu had definitely arrived. In India she was hailed as the Nightingale of Indian song, and J. B. Yeats's portrait of her made her a figure of pure romance. She emerged from seclusion, and she appeared on the Congress platform. The times too—those were the days of *Bandematararam*—were propitious for her entry into politics, and she moved among leaders a leader, lending colour and music and humour and vivacity to their meetings. In 1906, at the Calcutta session of the Indian Social Conference, she adroitly linked up the suppression of women's rights in India with the loss of the country's freedom—

Does one man dare to deprive another of his birthright to God's pure air which nourishes his body? How then shall a man dare to deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? And yet, my friends, man has so dared in the case of Indian women. That is why you men of India are today what you are: because your fathers, in depriving your mothers of that immemorial birthright, have robbed you, their sons, of your just inheritance. Therefore, I charge you, restore to your women their ancient rights. . .

Gokhale was touched, and he sent this pencilled note to her: "Your speech was more than an intellectual treat of the highest order. It was a perfect piece of art. We all felt for the moment to be lifted to a higher plane". On another occasion he said: "You begin with a ripple and end in eternity". As a general rule, Sarojini's orations seemed thus to soar high above the humdrum; and she herself would often appear, not only to glow with passion, but also literally to rise in stature. A typical Sarojini speech—especially in the days of her active participation in the politics of the Gandhian era—would be a flood of splendid improvisation, endowed with an oceanic movement, wave upon wave of emotion and sentiment surging and subsiding, each wave immenser and more long-drawn-out than its predecessor, shriller in tone and more overwhelming in effect.

Professor Amalendu Bose has thus described in vivid terms one of her great perorations—

For nearly a quarter of an hour, she spoke on the glories of poetry, its origin in the primordial spirit of man, its infinite variety, its pangs and ecstasies, all in a single sentence. And what a sentence! The words gushed out of her mouth in a ceaseless flow, clause succeeding clause to a richer and richer effect. The speaker no longer seemed to be a mortal woman; she became transfigured into a resplendent personage of a magic world from where the astonishing words flowed.

As she warmed up, her eyes acquired a lustre and sparkled more and more; every feather bristled, she was audaciously, imperiously alive. And when she resumed her seat at last, once again she was—what Mr. John Gawswordth found her to be—“a sigil of honour”; and yet, a random unpredictable moment, and there was the Order and the Star

In one fast falcon-flash
Of her vital and vigilant kind eyes.

Sarojini Naidu's second volume of poems, *The Bird of Time*, came out in 1912. In his Foreword to the book, Edmund Gosse remarked that there was discernible in it “a graver music” than in the earlier volume. These are “songs of life and death”—life is often brightly painted, but death's shadows creep or linger. *The Bird of Time*—like Galsworthy's *Cethru*—is impartial and sings gay and sad songs alike—

Songs of the glory and gladness of life,
Of poignant sorrow and passionate strife,
And the lilting joy of the spring;
Of hope that sows for the years unborn,
And faith that dreams of a tarrying morn,
The fragrant peace of the twilight's breath,
And the mystic silence that men call death.

There are love-songs, there are also dirges and elegies. Spring inspires her to song, but even as she thrills at the thought of the Festival of Spring, *Vasant Panchami*, her compassionate

heart rues the plight of the Hindu widow who has no part in the festive ceremonials—

Hail what have I to do with nesting birds,
 With lotus-honey, corn and ivory curds,
 With plantain blossom and pomegranate fruit,
 Or rose-wreathed lintels and rose-scented lute,
 With lighted shrines and fragrant altar fires,
 Where happy women breathe their hearts' desires?
 For my sad life is doomed to be, alas,
 Ruined and sere like sorrow-trodden grass. . .
 Akin to every lone and withered thing
 That hath foregone the kisses of the spring.

Two of the songs are entitled respectively 'Love and Death' and 'Death and Life'; and the Lord's only assurance is—

*Life is a prism of My light,
 And Death the shadow of My face.*

The Bird of Time was greeted by the reviewers as enthusiastically as the earlier volume. "She has more than a profusion of beautiful things", wrote Edward Thomas in the *Daily Chronicle*; "She possesses her qualities in heaped measure", declared *The Bookman*; and the *Yorkshire Post* acknowledged that "Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East". The poems comprise the dualities of life and death, joy and pain, and the music is 'graver', but as yet no chord has snapped, and the poet can still claim as her 'guerdon'—

For me, O My Master,
 The rapture of Love! . . .
 The rapture of Truth! . . .
 The rapture of song!

The change in note, however, is sharper in Sarojini Naidu's third and final collection, *The Broken Wing*, which was published in 1917. The memorial verses addressed to her father and to Gokhale are nobly articulate. Thus in salutation of her father—

O splendid dreamer in a dreamless age
 Whose deep alchemic vision reconciled
 Time's changing message with the undefiled
 Calm wisdom of thy Vedic heritage!

'The Flute-Player of Brindaban' is a jewel of a lyric, comparable only to 'To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus'. Even as Western poets and artists are for ever trying to picture the face of Jesus or the Madonna, Indian poets and artists have found the Buddha and Lord Krishna a perennial challenge to their imagination. In the caves at Ajanta, the Buddha is the ceaseless inspiration for the artist—a challenge as well as an inspiration. How is the artist to convey the whole arc of the Buddha's great compassion for all? Likewise, how is the artist to convey the power of Krishna's flute-playing to draw all towards him? Like the Hound of Heaven, Krishna's music too gives one no respite, no escape—

Why didst thou play thy matchless flute
 'Neath the Kadamba tree,
 And wound my idly dreaming heart
 With poignant melody,
 So where thou goest I must go,
 My flute-player, with thee? ...

To Indra's golden-flowering groves
 Where streams immortal flow,
 Or to sad Yama's silent Courts
 Engulfed in lampless woe,
 Where'er thy subtle flute I hear
 Beloved, I must go!

Among the other poems are 'The Lotus', addressed to M. K. Gandhi, and 'Awake', addressed to M. A. Jinnah, the Mahatma and the Qaid-e-Azam of the future! But what, in fact, is most characteristic in the volume is the intermittent subterranean rumbling, the pitiless evocation of broken images, the pointed rendering of naked beauty and truth and ferocity in the last section, *The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love*, a trilogy of lyric sequences, each of eight poems. An Indian critic, Mr. R. G. Rajwade, sees in the trilogy "more rhetoric than poetry. . . more violence than strength". On the other hand, Mr. Gawsorth

rightly declares that *The Temple* is Sarojini Naidu's "greatest regulated success. . . . Apart from Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, I know of no poetical sequence in English of such sustained passion addressed by a woman to a man". Gokhale himself had once remarked: "It was no doubt a brave and beautiful speech, but you sometimes use harsh, bold phrases"; and in several of the pieces in *The Broken Wing*—and not alone in the *Temple* section—she would appear to have conveyed both beauty and boldness, both the bite of anger and the heat of passion. The words 'break', 'broke', and 'broken' recur again and again, and hammer their meaning into our hearts. The vicissitudes of the poet's "pilgrimage of love" petrify us into awed attention. The glow, the surrender, the ecstasy; the recoil, the resentment, the despair; the reaction, the abasement, the acceptance—all are here. The flame of the resentment shoots up like mercury as the heat of the frenzy rages, and the instrument itself seems to burst with a bang—

Why did you turn your face away?
 Was it for love or hate? . . .
 Still for Love's sake I am foredoomed to bear
 A load of passionate silence and despair. . .

The first section of the trilogy describes love's early fulfilment and is named 'The Gate of Delight'. There is evidently a year's separation between the lovers, and when she comes back to her husband, he turns his face away. For a time, the woman suffers silently. Presently, however, her resentment wells up and 'The Menace of Love', the third poem in the second section, blazes with almost a Donne-like fury of vindictiveness—

The tumult of your own wild heart shall smite you
 With strong and sleepless pinions of desire,
 The subtle hunger in your veins shall bite you
 With swift and unrelenting fangs of fire.

When youth and spring passion shall betray you
 And mock your proud rebellion with defeat,
 God knows, O Love, if I shall save or slay you
 As you lie spent and broken at my feet!

In the fifth poem 'If You were Dead', she says that his death

would seal their difference, and she should therefore welcome his death! In 'Supplication' she softens and almost invokes his "atoning mercy"—

Restore me not the rapture that is gone,
The hope forbidden and the dream denied,
The ruined purpose and the broken pride. . .
Grant in the brief compassion of an hour
A gift of tears to save my stricken soul!

Her pleadings are in vain; he is the "slayer", and denied love, she is already dead—

They come, sweet maids and men with shining tribute,
Garlands and gifts, cymbals and songs of praise. . .
How can they know I have been dead, Beloved,
These many mournful days?

He has crushed her soul under his feet, her heart has been flung "to serve wild dogs for meat"; the tragic "secret" of her life is that she is dead, although seemingly alive. The third section, 'The Sanctuary', attempts a kind of resurrection after the death described in the second section. What is sundered will one day be joined again. Love will transcend present woes and prove triumphant in the long run. In any case, resentment is pointless, and acceptance is the only sane answer to the situation. She will not complain any longer, she will neither cherish hope nor quite give way to despair. She will return to her old adoration, asking nothing and expecting nothing; she is his to do what he likes—

Strangle my soul and fling it into the fire!
Why should my true love falter or fear or rebel?
Love, I am yours to lie in your breast like a flower,
Or burn like a weed for your sake in the flame of hell.

What are we to make of this group of 24 lyrics? Is it the description of an imaginary situation, or is it—in some measure at least—the lacerating recordation of a personal experience? The entire collection, *The Broken Wing*, is strewn with suggestions of a sudden distress that has overwhelmed the poet. Even the coming of Spring is no solace—

O Sweet! I am not false to you—
 Only my weary heart of late
 Has fallen from its high estate
 Of laughter and has lost the clue
 To all the vernal joy it knew. . .

I buried my heart so deep, so deep,
 Under a secret hill of pain,
 And said: "O broken pitiful thing,
 Even the magic spring
 Shall ne'er wake thee to life again. . ."

"Who cares if a woman's heart be broken?" "*O let my Love atone . . . O let my Death atone!*" "Welcome, O fiery Pain!" In a single poem, also entitled 'The Temple', the Pilgrim answers in reply to the Priest—

*O priest! only my broken lute I bring
 For Love's blood-offering!*

There is no mistaking the agony behind these cries. The poet almost feels like Othello that her "occupation is gone"!

One thing is clear: *The Broken Wing* was Sarojini Naidu's last collection of poems. She lived for another 32 years, but as a poet she ceased to be. It was not because she suddenly realized that one should write only in one's mother tongue—hers was Bengali or Urdu—and since she hadn't the requisite mastery of it, she gave up the profession of poetry. Neither was it because she realized at last that her poetical language, fashioned in the nineteen nineties under the shadow of the exoticism of Symonds, Dowson, Richard la Gallienne and the rest, was a mere tinsel, and quite unequal to the demands made upon it by a real poetic inspiration. It was not even because of her entry into politics, for she had been in it for over ten years without damaging her poetic inspiration. We are therefore driven to the conclusion that what had made her poetry possible and indeed inevitable, what had been its main sustenance, the fire that had kindled her words into life had been suddenly extinguished; and, after the final defiant flicker that was *The Broken Wing*, the poet had no desire to live or found no means of living. The woman, the mother, the patriot remained; but the poet was now no more than a memory.

But there was a resurrection all the same. With the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene, Sarojini Naidu found a new power to galvanize her to life. It was an age of heroic striving, an age of imperatives and absolutes. She looked into her bruised and broken heart once more and saw there a new Vision—the Vision of the chained Mother—and vowed to break the bonds. “My woman’s intelligence”, she once remarked, “cannot grapple with the transcendent details of politics”. But love of the Mother was no abstruse science, and therefore for Sarojini Naidu politics was but a form of love, and sedition but a form of poetry. The new lover expressed herself in inspiring oratory and fearless action. She presided over the Congress in 1925; she defied the bureaucracy at Dharamasana in 1930, as if she were the Maid of Orleans come back to life; she got her “pension and passage” and went cheerfully to prison. She had said in 1917: “What though there be no pilot to our boat? Co, tell them we need him not. God is with us, and we need no pilot”. Her assurance was all the greater when the nation found in the Mahatma its destined pilot at last. And so through fair weather and foul, in strength and in frailty, Sarojini Naidu kept faith with her leader till the very hour of his martyrdom—and beyond! Who can forget her fierce ringing words over the air, those words of terror and pity, those challenging words which seemed to pluck even from the nettle, Disaster, the flower, Hope? Her own death soon followed on 3 March 1949, and Nehru as Prime Minister then paid this fitting tribute to her in the Constituent Assembly:

She began life as a poetess. In later years, when the compulsion of events drew her into the national struggle and she threw herself into it with all the zest and fire she possessed, she did not write much poetry with pen and paper but her whole life became a poem and a song. . . . Just as the Father of the Nation had infused moral grandeur and greatness into the struggle, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu gave it artistry and poetry and that zest for life and indomitable spirit which, not only faced disaster and catastrophe, but faced them with a light heart and with a song on the lips and a smile on the face.

“Her work has a real beauty”, said Sri Aurobindo in 1935 about Sarojini Naidu’s poetry; “Some of her lyrical work is

likely, I think, to survive among the lasting things in English literature and by these, even if they are fine rather than great, she may take her rank among the immortals". On the other hand, in recent years it has become the fashion to denigrate Sarojini Naidu as no poet at all, or rather as a very bad poet. (Of course, she is in good company; Toru is with her; and so are Tagore and Sri Aurobindo!) So tyrannical is this fashion, so vociferous are the fashion-mongers, that Dr. Shankar Mokashi-Punekar has to begin his recent appreciative essay on a defensive note: "For a practising poet, to write on Sarojini Naidu with an o'J-world enthusiasm is a business liability". The gravamen of the charge against Sarojini Naidu is that she didn't write like Eliot or Pound; she didn't go on writing even like herself. Her poems are immediately intelligible; they rhyme and they scan; there is no ruggedness in their phrasing; they have a feeling for place, occasion and atmosphere; they have rhythmic variety and melodic richness. But, then, they are not weighted with obscurity, nor knotted with contortions, nor peppered with punctuation or typographical acrobatics. Familiar, traditional, often rhetorical, often sentimental, sometimes obvious; unattractive to the new criticism, unrewarding to Freudian exploration, unresponsive to 'commitment' aesthetics: what's the use of Sarojini's poetry, then?

In the four published volumes, there are about 200 songs and lyrics. Many of them just sing themselves out, thereby gently warding off all attempts at surgical analysis. 'Cradle-Song' (in *The Golden Threshold*) and 'Child Fancies' (in the posthumous collection, *The Feather of the Dawn*) are equally poems for children; and children do enjoy them even if adults (oppressed by their sense of mission) cannot:

From groves of spice
O'er fields of rice
Athwart the lotus-stream,
I bring for you,
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream. . .

When the silver sunbeams call,
Dragonfly, dragonfly,
To bumble bees and humming birds,

I wonder as you shy
 In such a crowd to spread
 Your wings of green and red
 And go gathering lotus honey
 From the pools, dragonfly?

You don't dissect Keats's 'There was once a naughty boy ...',
 and neither should we these songs for children.

Sarojini Naidu loved her native Hyderabad, and she was not
 afraid to make music out of her fascination for bazaars in the
 city and the bustling tradesmen and the variegated merchan-
 dise:

What do you weigh, O ye vendors?
 Saffron and lentil and rice.
 What do you grind, O ye maidens?
 Sandalwood, henna, and spice.
 What do you call, O ye pedlars?
 Chessmen and ivory dice.

What do you cry, O ye fruitmen?
 Citron, pomegranate, and plum.
 What do you play, O musicians?
 Sitar, sarangi, and drum.
 What do you chant, O magicians?
 Spells for the aeons to come.

And historic Golconda makes her a little wistful and sad:

I muse among those silent fanes
 Whose spacious darkness guards your dust. . .

Her description of a tropical night in 'Leili' is one of her
 most satisfying Nature poems:

A caste-mark on the azure brows of Heaven,
 The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright.
 The winds are dancing in the forest-temple.
 And swooning at the holy feet of Night.
 Hush! in the silence mystic voices sing
 And make the gods their incense-offering.

She struck the right 'patriotic' note again and again. Love of
 one's country was an emotion as much as the love of man or

Nature, and some of her poems—for example, her invocations to the national leaders and her lyrics, 'Awake', 'An Anthem of Love' and 'To India'—are patriotic without the faintest trace of jingoism. Occasionally she could translate her identification with the people's sufferings into a gesture of protest:

Stay the relentless anger of Thy hand.
Thine awful war, O Lord, no longer wage
Against our hapless hearts and heritage. . .

While she usually preferred the calm of mind to the storm, the music of the flute to the tumult of the soul, she has sung of these too—the whirling eddies, the raging fevers—in several of her poems, notably in *The Broken Wing*. She was, above all, sensitive to beauty, the beauty of living things, the beauty of holiness, the beauty of the Buddha's compassion, the beauty of Brindavan's Lord. She didn't specially seek out the bizarre, the exotic, the exceptional, but her poems lack neither variety nor the flavour of actuality. Children's poems, nature poems, patriotic poems, poems of love and death, even poems of mystical transcendence, Sarojini Naidu essayed them all; and with her unfailing verbal felicity and rhythmical dexterity, she generally succeeded as well. Seldom did she venture out of her depth; she wasn't interested in wild experimentation; she didn't cudgel herself towards explosive modernity. But she had genuine poetic talent, and she was a wholesome and authentic singer.

Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity nor, on the whole, of high quality. Enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English—but seldom for actual stage production. Madhusudan Dutt's *Is this called Civilization?* came out in 1871. Rabindranath Tagore's plays—*Chitra*, *The Post Office*, *Sacrifice*, *Red Oleanders*, *Chandalika*, *Mukta Dhara*, *Natir Puja*, and the rest—are now available to us in English renderings (often his own), and these have been discussed already in an earlier talk. Sri Aurobindo's *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric*, however, were written in English as original dramatic creations. Of these, only *Perseus* was published in Sri Aurobindo's life-time, but all are full-length five-act plays in blank verse, recognizably Elizabethan in cast. *Perseus*, *Rodogune* and *Eric* take us back to Syria and Norway of long ago, while *Vasavadutta* and *The Viziers* likewise transport us to ancient India and Persia respectively. But all five plays are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti,—though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones.

*Rodogune*¹ was posthumously published in 1958, but it evidently belongs to Sri Aurobindo's early Baroda period. The play is located in Syria, not the Syria of history and geography, but the Syria of the poet's unfettered imagination. *Rodogune*, former Parthian princess, is captive attendant of Cleopatra, Queen of Syria. At the death of her second husband, Cleopatra's two sons—Antiochus and Timocles—by her first husband return

¹ In her long essay, 'Rodogune: A Study' (*Sri Aurobindo Circle*—XXII Number, 1966). Prema Nandakumar has discussed the play in relation to its possible 'sources', especially Corneille's *Rodogune*.

to Syria from Egypt where they had so long been brought up by their uncle Ptolemy. Cleopatra's mother-love is selfish and possessive, and she behaves towards her sons much as King Lear behaves towards his daughters, and mistakes fulsome flattery for real love. Antiochus, rejected by Cleopatra, raises the banner of revolt to claim the throne of Syria; and he is joined by Rodogune, who loves and is loved by him. Timocles too is enamoured of her, but for the time being he submits to his crafty Chancellor Phayllus' wiles and his unscrupulous sister Cleone's seductions. The civil war between the brothers seesaws for a while, till at last Antiochus returns to Syria with Rodogune, and renounces his claim to the throne, though not to Rodogune's love. Phayllus, however, works upon Timocles' infatuation for Rodogune and gets the King to agree to the secret killing of Antiochus. But Rodogune also follows her lover to his grave, and so Timocles realizes that he has played murderous Cain in vain. He now turns upon Phayllus and Cleone, and sends them to their death. Cleopatra and Timocles are thus left in the end to stew in the juice of their own concoction. Of the lesser characters, Eunice, a princess who also loves Antiochus though not possessively, Eremite the captain who plays the sinister soothsayer and Mentho the outspoken nurse are vividly drawn. The plotting of the play is good, the rivalry between the brothers is brought out very well, and Antiochus is a hero swayed and trapped by destiny, and is broken at last. The blank verse is flexible and forcible enough, but there are not wanting cumbrous inversions and prosaisms indicating both early and unrevised work. But the eloquent passages are very good in their kind. Thus Antiochus to Rodogune—

Wert thou my fate
Of death itself, delightful Rodogune,
Not, as thou art, heaven's pledge of bliss, I'd not abstain
From thy delight but have my joy of thee
The short while it is possible on earth.
O, play not with the hours, my Rodogune.
Why should brief man defer his joys and wait
As if life were eternal?

His long soliloquy on the eve of his decision to return to Syria and throw himself on his brother's mercy is well sustained—

This earth is but a hillock when all's said,
 The sea an azure puddle. All tonight
 Seems strange to me; my wars, ambition, fate
 And what I am and what I might have been,
 Float round me vaguely and withdraw from me
 Like grandiose phantoms in a mist...

The major attraction of the play, of course, is the gallery of women: Cleopatra, womanly, wilful and vengeful; her brave nurse who would not easily be silenced; the contrasted pair, Cleone the scheming bitch and Eunice the undemanding princess; and, above all, Rodogune herself, the haunting creature of beauty and romance and tragedy.

*Perseus*² too is located in Syria, but here the centre of attraction is not the hero, but Andromeda the heroine. The traditional Andromeda is a passive figure, a patient sufferer, and Perseus is the miracle-worker who saves her at the nick of time from the jaws of the dreaded sea-monster. In Sri Aurobindo's *Perseus*, however, Andromeda actively fights evil, braving the consequences. She is the spearhead of the evolutionary urge to reach higher realms of consciousness. Her decisive action, which is born of pity, brings her into conflict with the forces of reaction, and especially with Polydaon the Priest of Poseidon and Poseidon himself. But Andromeda's courage brings Perseus to her side, and Pallas Athene also is committed to the evolutionary advance. Pity and Power—in other words, Andromeda and Perseus—are united, revenge and ruthlessness are beaten back, and the way is clear for a decisive forward step in the adventure of evolution. In the Prologue to the play, Pallas hurls her gauntlet on man's behalf before Poseidon—

Me the Omnipotent
 Made from His being to lead and discipline
 The immortal spirit of man, till he attain
 To order and magnificent mastery
 Of all his outward world. . .

² The reader is referred to my 'Andromeda' (*Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1948) for a historical study of the Perseus-Andromeda myth from Euripides to Sri Aurobindo.

I bid thee not,
O azure strong Poseidon, to abate
Thy savage tumults: rather his march oppose.
For through the shocks of difficulty and death
Man shall attain his godhead.

As in Christopher Fry's *Thor, with Angels* and Tagore's *Sacrifice*, in *Perseus* too there is a clash between the old ethic and the new, and the new *must* prevail—else chaos will come again! Apart from the evolutionary slant given to the play, what really holds the play together as drama is the character of Andromeda, her womanliness, her compassion, her immaculate purity of purpose. Chained to the rock she shudders but does not repent, though a mist of doubt films her eyes; is the world only for the mighty, and will this world always be a "world of blood"? The fanatic priest, Polydaon, is also memorably drawn, and his epitaph is read by Perseus—

This man for a few hours became the vessel
Of an occult and formidable Force
And through his form it did fierce terrible things
Unhuman: but his small and gloomy mind
And impure dark heart could not contain the Force.
It turned in him to madness and demoniac
Huge longings. Then the Power withdrew from him
Leaving the broken incapable instrument,
And all its might was split from his body. . .

Vasavadutta, like *Rodogune*, is a posthumous publication, and appeared only in 1957, based on a version of the play dated 1916—the last of several versions. Less purposive perhaps than *Perseus*, *Vasavadutta* is more deeply dyed with the hues of romance and is thus rather closer to *Rodogune*. The story is traceable in its main outlines to Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*, and there is also the dramatic version by Bhasa in his *Svapna Vasavadutta*. But Sri Aurobindo has given the story a dramatic intensity and psychological subtlety of its own, and his play is therefore wonderfully articulate as a romance and as drama. The hero of the play is Vuthsa Udayan, the young King of Cowsambie. Although we readily take his heroism and prowess for granted, actually he is a passive figure in the play.

Because he is what he is, things happen to him and to others. Mahasegu, King of Avunthie, is his principal political rival, and he has Udayan kidnapped and imprisoned, his daughter Vasavadutta being the jailor! It is her job now to bewitch him to slavery to her beauty and so to Mahasegu himself. But the jailor becomes herself a prisoner, as foreseen by her mother, Queen Ungarica—

Thou wilt know, my bliss,
The fiercest sweet ordeal that can seize
A woman's heart and body. O my child,
Thou wilt house fire, thou wilt see living gods;
And all thou hadst thought and known will melt away
Into a flame and be reborn.

The moves and counter-moves of Mahasegu and Yougundharayan, Udayan's minister, are but the feeble background that pointedly stresses the foreground drama of Vasavadutta's flaming love for Udayan. Among the minor characters, Ungarica and Munjoolica the captive princess of Sourashtra are delineated with subtlety and understanding. Once again Sri Aurobindo is revealed as a competent craftsman in verse.

*The Viziers of Bassora*³ is pure romance. The slave-girl, Anice-al-jalice, and Nureddene, the Vizier Alfazzal's son, fall in love, and despite the machinations of the bad Vizier, Almuene, manage to find favour in the eyes of Haroun al Rashid, the great and benevolent King of Baghdad, and are crowned King and Queen of Bassora. The rivalry between the two Viziers (the good Alfazzal and the wicked Almuene) is the world without, which is in sorry contrast to the love of Anice and Nureddene, which is the world within. Haroun plays Providence and brings happiness to the lovers and thwarts Almuene. The play is a delight to read, the imagery is rich and sensuous, and the versification has an easy lilt. More weighted with purpose, *Eric* has affiliations with *Perseus*. Eric is the elected King of Norway, a veritable Man of Destiny. Aslaug, the sister of Eric's

³ In her essay on the play (*Sri Aurobindo Circle*—XXIII Number, 1967), Prema Nandakumar has discussed it in relation to its 'source', 'The Tale of the Beautiful Sweet-Friend' in the *Arabian Nights* (32nd to 36th Night).

enemy, Swegn, and Hertha (Swegn's wife), come to Eric's court dressed as dancing girls, their aim being to destroy Eric. But Eric falls in love with Aslaug, and she too is drawn towards him in spite of her determination to kill him. Love triumphs over Hate, Freya over Thor, even as Pallas Athene triumphs over Poseidon in *Perseus*:

Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by Love. . .

All five plays underline the need for Love, for Love alone is the great solvent of all varieties of evil. Love is supreme truth and goodness and power, and it can defy death and conquer it, and turn dross into gold.

Sri Aurobindo was a prophet and a recluse, and he stood apart in unique solitariness, and anyhow his five plays were but a small fraction of his phenomenal literary output. The verse dramatic form has attracted other writers too, thanks mainly to the potent spell of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. For example, there appeared in 1928 a play in five Acts and 27 Scenes entitled *Nala and Damayanti*, by Vasudeva Rao. It is a tour-de-force in about 250 pages, mainly in blank verse, but interspersed with songs and prose scenes, all in the Elizabethan tradition. It is the familiar *Mahabharata* story, of course, but it can still thrill a modern reader. Damayanti and Nala meet rather as Juliet and Romeo do—in a garden. The eight gods are her suitors, and Nala is but the spokesman; but Damayanti prefers Nala to the gods—

Ah me, vex not a heart that yearns for thy love.
But mortal maid am I; how may I wed
The Gods? Each life has its own element;
The fish takes to the salt wave of the brine,
But die it must if cast into a sea
Which flows with milk, if that were possible.
I love thee, Nala . . .

The gods are not easily mocked, and Kali means mischief—

Since I am what I be,
The night of ages, I will darken most
His vision.

Damayanti has her moments of premonition—

Not sad, my lord, nor still; but a brief spell
Of some vague fear that hath not name nor shape.

Nala plays a game of dice with Pushkara and loses all, but
Damayanti is his *shakti* still—

Fear not, my lord,
Not the deep-rooted hills, nor the massed earth,
Nor even the sphered stars in the great sky
Be constant like our love.

But the preordained separation cannot be avoided, and so they
pass their term of tribulation. The reunion takes place in due
course, and as Damayanti wonders whether she is merely
dreaming, Nala says—

Aye, we be visions still; there be no truth
Beyond vision: all else be nought.

Vasudeva Rao seems also to have published a lot of narrative
poetry in blank verse, mainly renderings from the *Mahabharata*.

Another unusual verse play is *The Flute of Krishna* by P. A. Krishnaswamy (1950). The girl Vidyaratna has a vague thirst for the Infinite, and dreams of Krishna's flute which is really the Indian bhakta's perennial food. She meets the boy Murali who is attracted to her and they marry. On the wedding night, however, Vidyaratna sees only Krishna's shadow behind her husband, and her face is transfigured by joy. Murali feels that Vidyaratna is God's bride, not his—

Devi! I am unworthy of thee!
Thou hast obtained God,
By love and bhakti and prayer and adoration;
While I am trying still to obtain Him,
By wisdom and knowledge.

Oh! Thou fortunate among women!
I adore thee!

Later, after singing a sensuous song of love which provokes his desires, he still feels helpless, for he cannot seize the fruit

though it is within his reach; Vidyaratna is not for the cumbrous grasp of such as he,—at least, not now:

Ha! That is how the poet sings!
My wine is ever before me!
And I never even touch it or taste it!
Some day, perhaps?
But not now; No—not now!

They have endless trials which they face bravely, and they willingly serve the needy. While tending a sick woman, they catch the contagion and die of the fever. But their prayers are realized after their death, for she becomes the Flute of Lord Krishna and Murali becomes the stick with which the Divine Cowherd drills his cattle into order. The last Act opens years after the passing away of the lovers, and Krishna comes to the place where they are buried, cuts a bamboo stick, and a piece of the bamboo bush in which he makes holes. His flute and his stick are ready, "and all the herd come close and graze near him". Mr. Krishnaswamy's is a commendable exercise in fancy, and is finely sustained by the cardinal faith of the *bhakta* that utter dedication to the Lord is never in vain.

A far more important writer than either Vasudeva Rao or Krishnaswamy, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has always been noted for his fecundity and versatility, and he is not only a commendable poet, he has a number of plays and playlets also to his credit. *Five Plays* (1937) contains some of his characteristic work as a playwright revealing his social consciousness, flair for realism, and the bite in his prose writing. 'The Window' (dedicated to the Brave Textile Workers of Parel, Bombay) gives a lacerating account of the slum life of the workers, and ends with the Worker protesting against the proposal to tax Light, smashing the window-panes, and rushing out with the words:

Light, Light in the worker's home—for ever.

'The Parrot' is dedicated "to all those whose morality is not a parrot's cage", and concerns only three characters: Man, Woman, and Tramp. The drunken Man drowns the Woman's

son thinking it is their son—he would not have his son suffer in this world as he has suffered. Now the Woman says: “Fool! he was not your son—the boy is the Tramp’s son”. In ‘The Sentry’s Lantern’, Chattopadhyaya probes into the consciousness of a bourgeois poet, a merchant and a worker, all three awaiting the dawn when they are to be hanged. The Worker says: “The Revolution will come—the Revolution will come—red like this dawn, red like this dawn”. ‘The Coffin’ is another satire on the bourgeois artist and his make-believe world. Mohan the would-be artist is jolted back to life when his wife runs away with a rich man, and his daughter Rani dies of a broken heart. But before she dies, she tells her father: “Promise you will write about starving babies, about cruel masters, about poor sad woman, about people who are shot because they asked for bread”. The last play, ‘The Evening Lamp’, is dedicated “to those who may be able to light it towards the new Dawn of Realism”. The Young Man in love with Shadow tells the Maid in the end: “At last, we, the Lovers of Shadow, ourselves the shadows moving to our new home, the home of the waiting-bride of Life—come, let me lead you into our new home”. The door opens, the shadows fly, and glorious light streams in. Although these plays are too heavily coated with purpose, they have a tautness and intensity that are seldom found in our dramatic writing. These plays were indeed manifestoes of the new realism.

Harindranath’s plays and playlets on the lives of the Saints are, perhaps, less dramatically effective than his plays of social protest, but they have their individuality too. Numerous are the God-intoxicated Prahadas whose lives move the hearts of millions in India. In a play like *Pundalik*, there is a conversion in the end brought about by the sisters, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati; and the sinner becomes a saint. *Saku Bai*, *Mira Bai*, *Jayadeva*, *Choka Mela*, *Eknath*, *Tukaram*, *Raidas*, *Kannappan*, saints one and all who defy the weights and measures of the human superbazaar and prefer to rely on the ‘grace of Grace’ that never fails them. The heart of a play must needs be a struggle of some sort, and in the lives of the Saints the conflict is between human ‘power’ and divine Grace; and the saints themselves are often no more than passive, but it is on the

tableland of their unwavering Faith that the battles between Power and Grace are fought. In the end, mere 'power' is worsted every time and there is a conversion—of the robbers in *Jayadeva*, of the mother-in-law in *Saku Bai*, of the brahmins in *Raidas* and *Choka Mela*. Miracles naturally play an important part in these plays, and unless the reader comes to them with a willing suspension of disbelief, the plays will not make sense to him. In *Kannappan*, a mere hair's breadth divides the sublime from the ridiculous. But the childlike faith of Indian humanity has woven memories of these saints into the warp and woof of a living *bhakti* tradition. Although Harin's plays are but exercises in dramatic verse, their motivation is pure and the verses often rise to poetic heights.

Of the hagiological plays, the most ambitious as also the most recent is *Siddharta: Man of Peace* (1956). But it is by no means a good play, though there are a few good things in it; Harindranath Chattopadhyaya is now an active politician, a Leftist high-gospeller, and he has neither the time nor perhaps even the inclination to submit to the discipline of art. *Siddharta* begins with a Prologue, which is really a symbolic presentation of the present crisis in civilization as a result of the discovery of nuclear power. The situation is succinctly described thus—

Millions dying and dead
in Europe
in Russia
in China ...

Then the main events in the Buddha's life, as traditionally known, are presented dramatically in prose scenes interspersed with occasional verse. The Chorus speaks from time to time. The 'shocks' to Prince Siddharta's equanimity—age, sickness, death—followed by his Great Renunciation and the search for enlightenment and the fight with Mara and the forces of Evil under the Bo-Tree and the final Victory and attainment of Buddhahood—all come in their proper order. Only the language seldom rises to the appropriate heights. The Buddha says when Mara has been routed at last—

O Earth! Mother of Life! be witness, my Goddess of Truth!
My Earth! you are witness I have triumphed, I have
conquered.

The kingdom of heaven is here. You, Earth! are the true
and only kingdom of heaven. And man, the only god!

There is a touching scene when he returns to his native city of Kapilavastu and meets his wife, Yasodhara, and son, Bahula. But the language fails again. And the Bhikku's concluding speech is sheer bathos—

. . . From Buddha's time the message has been coming down right up to our own when Mahatma Gandhi preached it and even died for it. And today, Jawaharlal Nehru bears in his hand the banner of Panchasila . . .

Yet this same Harindranath was greeted fifty years ago by Sri Aurobindo as a poet of almost infinite possibilities!

The paucity of good actable English dramas written by Indians is mainly attributable to the fact that the natural medium of conversation with us—excepting for the supersophisticated who live in the cities and the larger towns, in the Universities or in certain Government offices or business houses—is the mother tongue rather than English, and hence, unless the characters and situations are carefully chosen, it would be difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound convincing. Of course, there are certain perennial situations that transcend place, time and language. Thus T. P. Kailasam's English plays—unlike his Kannada plays—are inspired by Puranic themes, but he renders them brilliantly in the intellectual idiom of our own day. *The Burden* and *Fulfilment* were published in 1933, and they are short poignant pieces. *The Burden* handles the theme that Bhasa dramatized in his *Statue Play*, but Kailasam's has a power and beauty of its own. Bharata, returning from his grandfather's place to Ayodhya, slowly gropes his way to the terrible truth that Dasaratha, his father, is dead. Like Oedipus, Bharata too learns the truth last of all, even Satrugna's eyes being opened a little earlier; and Kailasam has shown in the play that he can make prose a fit vehicle for the expression of tragic emotion. *Fulfilment* is a longer, and a more lacerating play; it bites and scalds and stabs. Ekalavya, Drona's

unique pupil in archery, is about to join the Kauravas on the eve of the Kurukshetra war. Krishna tries to dissuade Ekalavya from making common cause with the human-wolves, the Kauravas, but Drona's pupil is adamant. Ekalavya and Krishna debate about 'first and last' things, about man's duty, about good and evil, about courage and cowardice. Krishna is driven at last to stab Ekalavya on the sly, and is further compelled to assure the dying archer that his mother will not grieve on account of his death. To carry out his promise, Krishna is forced to commit one more 'murder'—he kills the mother too, lest she should learn about Ekalavya's death and grieve for him. A terrible play—as terrible in its sheer horror as Lord Dunsany's *Night at an Inn—Fulfilment* is almost the crown of Kailasam's dramatic art. Krishna remains divine-human in spite of his ruthlessness, for his words to Ekalavya have already prepared us for the double tragedy and the pre-ordained 'fulfilment'.

The Purpose (1944), chronologically a later play, unfolds Ekalavya's youthful idealism during his discipleship in archery. He would be protector of the fawns in the forest from the attention of the wolves, and so he achieves his infallible skill in archery through his immaculate apprenticeship to Drona. But caught between the antecedent 'purpose' and the consequent loyalty to the Guru, Ekalavya's very nobility drives him to a virtual abandonment of his 'purpose'. What Drona begins here, Krishna completes in *Fulfilment*; and the gallant Nishada's life—though not his glory—becomes extinct.

A more sustained dramatic adventure was Kailasam's *Karna: the Brahmin's Curse*, which although written much earlier was published as a book only in 1946. It is described by the author as "an impression of Sophocles in five acts", and indeed there is something of an Oedipus-fatality and glow in Kailasam's *Karna*. Destiny weaves its coils relentlessly, and whithersoever he may turn—Oedipus or Karna—he is caught in the meshes, checkmated at every turn, thwarted and defeated again and again—but also purified and glorified in the process. Written in a mixture of prose and verse, the language—often quaint or knotted—rises repeatedly to sheer poetic heights. The *Mahabharata* is here in dramatic miniature, and one of the great

speeches, the key speech almost, is given to Droupadi when she traces the origin of all the woes to the hatred in the heart of her own father when he desired progeny—

'Twas royal Drupada,
Obsess'd of hate, in rite of hate did force
The sacrificial fire to yield him triplets, tongues
Of flame in me and brothers two, with but
A single purpose in our lives: the burning of
This house to less than cinders ...
I am but flame! Although you see me in
A woman's frame! And all assembled here
Are food for me—a flame begat of hate;
A flame brought forth to burn this house
Of cold cold moon!

In this scene, Droupadi is both long-suffering Jocasta and the prophetic star-crossed Cassandra, seeing in a flash the inevitable total doom hanging over the Kuru house. The curse on Karna—namely, that at the mention of his supposed lowly origin he would be paralysed for the nonce, unable to string the arrow to his bow—is no doubt the spinal column of the play's plotting. The working out of the curse punctuates the dramatic action, giving every time a new edge of despair to Karna's giant endeavours to redeem himself and redeem his royal friend and master, Duryodhana; and he dies as he has lived, valorous and bountiful and pure, yet also frustrated and discomfited. Kailasam himself has provided in a sonnet prefixed to the play a fitting dirge in honour of his hero—

Alas!
Befooled babe 'gainst fate's bewild'ring odds!
Bejewell'd bauble of the jeering gods!

Kailasam's rendering of Puranic characters like Bharata, Krishna, Ekalavya, Karna, Droupadi, Kunti and others has a touch of iconoclasm, but actually the idealism is deeper than the iconoclasm. The *Gita* itself is summed up in a few pregnant words on the eve of Arjuna reluctantly killing Karna—

It is the purpose of the killing, not
The means and manner of the killing that

Decides the fairness-justness of the killing ...
 Abjure Ambition; absorb Absolution!
 Perish Flesh; cherish, nourish Spirit!
 Erase thine Entity; embrace Entirety!
 Annihilate the individual within thee;
 Assimilate the universal without thee!
 With mind unsullied of all thoughts
 Of good and bad,
 With heart unthrilled of all throbs
 Of sad and glad,
 Think but of Me, and slay thy Foe
 That loometh there as shadow 'twixt
 Thy rigorous brother and his rightful throne,
 And lay the burden of thy selfless deed
 Of thine eternal alter-ego—Me!

The Karna of the *Mahabharata*—like many other characters in the epic, but he more than others—is a “web ... of a mingled yarn, good and ill together”; valour and vindictiveness, magnanimity and meanness. It was not very difficult therefore for Kailasam to turn Karna’s life into tragic drama. But the Keechaka of the epic is mainly an unpleasant and repulsive character, a slave of the passions and a creature of lust and vanity. Nevertheless he is a first-class wrestler, on a par with Bhima and Balarama; and he is Virata’s Commander-in-chief. In his last play, *Keechaka* (1949), Kailasam faces an apparently hopeless task with his tremendous self-assurance, and once again the result is a poetic tragedy. Kailasam almost transforms Keechaka into a hero in his own right, a man of steady loyalties, a fighter, and a man of honour; and the driving force behind his actions is love rather than lust. He is like a man tragically fated, and he is content to go down fighting before a truly worthy opponent like Bhima. Although Kailasam’s total output is by no means impressive, these few plays are enough to establish his claim to be considered an original talent that tried, not unsuccessfully, to achieve superb self-expression through the medium of drama.

Among other writers of verse plays, a reference may be made here to Dhan Gopal Mukherji who wrote a musical play *Layla-Majnu*, Dilip Kumar Roy who has dramatized the life of Chaitanya, and B. S. Mardhekar, author of *Prometheus Rebound*, an audacious new rendering of the ancient Greek myth, already

handled fruitfully—though in widely different ways—by Aeschylus, Shelley and Andre Gide.

There is also Bharati Sarabhai,⁴ the most distinguished of the women dramatists. Her first play, *The Well of the People* (1943), was a poetic pageant more than a play. A brahmin widow, unable to achieve her ambition of going to Haridwar or Kashi, decides to build with her savings a temple well for the Harijans in her dear old village. But alas! the pitcher is broken at the threshold of the well to be; the old woman "falls forward on the ground", and the Chorus makes the appropriate comment—

Even now your senses lave,
Fall and wash, splashing along
Golden walls, Benares lies
Within, you will live, live
To see the people's well
Spell in rose golden walls
Pouring dumb before your eyes.

Round the bare bones of this story, Bharati Sarabhai has allowed flesh to grow and blood streams to flow, and the play has thus become a fabric of symbolism and poetry, memory and melody, and evokes all the heart-aches that are Mother India's.

Her more recent play, *Two Women*, is in prose, but the prose is not seldom charged with poetic feeling and is often packed with thought. The tension at the heart of Hindustan, the opposing pulls of tradition and revolt, the paralysis that makes the impulse to move forward in so futile a gesture,—this tension, these pulls, and this paralysis are the soul of the play. The 'two women' of the play are Anuradha, the wife of the Anglicized Kanaka Raya, and Urvashi, the widowed girl who turns a devotional singer; and each of these women is herself two women in one—an artist and a saint. The great merit of the drama is that, although it reaches some sort of conclusion, we are left with the impression that the real conclusion is yet to come—not in the lives of Anuradha and Urvashi alone, but in our own lives, in Bharat's life, as well.

⁴ There is a detailed discussion of her plays in Prema Nandakumar's 'Bharati Sarabhai's English Plays' in *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English* (1968), pp. 249-269.

It is a far cry from Kailasam or Bharati Sarabhai to V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, for the latter was mainly a master of social comedy, delighting in the incongruous, ludicrous and droll elements in the lives of the sophisticated middle-class people most frequently encountered in cities like Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. The plays included in the two volumes of his *Dramatic Divertissements* consist mainly of interesting situations where vivacious, entertaining, quick-witted dialogue is possible, but he has also attempted historical drama in 'At Any Cost' and serious drama in 'The Bricks Between'. But V. V. S. cannot create the illusion of historic truth, and his art cannot transcend the stage of intellectual analysis and soar into the regions of the higher realism where the lie becomes the truth and the impossible is seen to be very probable indeed. But he had a real talent for the concoction of enjoyable farces and comedies. 'The Surgeon-General's Prescription' is pure fun; and so is 'Vichu's Wife'. Vichu (Visvanatha Iyer) wouldn't marry in the old way—that is, the girl being chosen by the parents after comparing horoscopes and marking the omens. His ideal of a wife is—

Well—she must not be under sixteen ...

She must be tall ...

She must have bright and loving eyes ...

She must be very handsome—a sort of Greek beauty ...

She must be a painter and a poet ...

She must be highly cultured, soft, tender, and delicate in manners, with high ideals, noble—great— ...

Vichu's friends, Iyengar and Mudaliar, decide to 'gull' him. Young Madanagopal is persuaded to impersonate a Miss Bhasker with the necessary qualifications, and at a party this supposed beauty is introduced to Vichu, who falls in love with her at once and proposes to her. The truth is presently revealed, and Vichu learns his lesson—or does he? The gulling of a man with a 'humour'—whether he be Malvolio or Benedick or Vichu—is always entertaining and has even a cathartic effect. V. V. S. was really good at skimming the surface of Madras 'society' during the first quarter of this century. While commending these plays for their humour, dialogue, and their facile style as also their gentle social criticism, Mr. Justice Coutts-Trotter added:

They have a further claim on the interest, especially of the European reader, which is almost unique. It is said the Englishman's home is his castle: the Indian's home is not merely a castle, but a castle which has no visitors' days and through whose windows a peep is rarely granted. . . . These plays give us charming little sketches of social life in India.

A. S. P. Ayyar and J. M. Lobo-Prabhu are two other dramatists of some distinction. In *Slaves of Ideas and Other Plays*, Ayyar handles the prose medium effectively, and he is seen to be a vigorous critic of contemporary life. His 'Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity' is both good dialectic and good drama. Lobo-Prabhu's *Collected Plays* includes 'Apes in the Parlour', a long skit on our sophisticated life. 'The Family Cage' is an attempt to present the plight of a widowed sister in a joint family, but it is actually worked out in terms of melodrama. 'Flags of the Heart' is a sentimental piece with a sentimental conclusion. Lobo-Prabhu's energy is obvious, he can write dialogues with facility, he can devise situations; but his characters are rarely alive, and his denouements are seldom wholly convincing.

There is, then, S. Fyzee-Rahamin's *Daughter of Ind* (1940). Its theme is the love of the untouchable girl, Malti, for her master, an idealistic Englishman. Though a sentimental story, it is scaffolded by a singular dramatic machinery. There is a Prologue, and there is an Epilogue; the Narrator butts in and comments on the action; flowers have tongues and speak eloquently. The icy wind of politics blows in—and satire and symbolism stalk together. In spite of these divers and discordant elements, *Daughter of Ind* has a power of its own; and Malti herself is too wise and too good and too unassertive to gain her desires on *this* side and shoal of Time. But she knows the meaning of love, and she is ready to give rather than to demand; and as the Narrator says in the end, "She gave her greater self with its inner spiritual glory—she was the candle that burnt itself to give light to others".

Suryadutt J. Bhatt's *The Trial Celestial* (1940) is too heavily weighted with purpose to be a good play. Among the characters are the Almighty who, although "stripped of all his attributes", is a genial fellow enough; Voltaire, who has his moments

of forensic indignation; the Astral Spirit, who blows alternately hot and cold; and the Old Man in search of His God, who is supposed to struggle "through life on the strength of a misplaced faith". Even if God cannot be dethroned, he should at least be made an innocuous creature "incapable of interfering with men's affairs"; and this play is presumably the dialectic antecedent to the threatened revolution!

An entirely different kind of play is *Hali* by G. V. Desani. It was published in 1950, and received due praise for its originality, its symbolism, the richness of its imagery, its sheer apocalyptic quality. A short poetic play, *Hali* is an attempt to project the story of a 'passion': in other words, Hali's confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communion with Love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place. The characters in the passion-play are Isha the Lord, Rahu the adversary, the mother Mira, the foster-mother and friend Maya, the beloved Rooh, the Magician, the Narrator and of course Hali himself. The 'action' is merely symbolic, and takes place really in the theatre of Hali's soul.

As god-like in his beauty Hali moves among the hills afflictions come to him one after another. He loses his mother Mira and his fawn Sha. He is tended by Maya, and when he grows to be a man he falls in love with Rooh, but he loses her also. Ten days later, Hali's 'passion' begins. All the issues of life and death, love and hate, reality and illusion, are fought in his soul's sanctuary; he is tempted and teased, he is pampered and punished. In his predicament, neither Isha nor Mira can help him; Rooh has been torn away from him; and Maya's ministrations but prolong his agony. The Magician can invoke the past, but he cannot annul it. During the progress of the 'passion', apocalyptic visions are thrown by psychic ecstasies. Rahu as phantom Hali and the real Hali speak to Rooh at cross purposes. And although Hali's is the affirmation of the beauty and holiness and peace of love, Rahu only taunts and threatens, and he prophesies war and discord and destruction, the ruin of Hali's dreams and hopes and endeavours:

Hereafter, Hali, thy days shall be nights and thy nights pain. And thine eyes shall not tell thee truth, and thou shalt see thy Rooh ravished, and thou shalt see thy Rooh slain, whenever a sister of thine shall be slain. Thy heart shall no longer be the cradle of love, as agone, as afore, and thou shalt live in hate, and bear, bear the sins of thy brother, thy cursed cursed brother, and thy sister, thy cursed cursed sister, and thou shalt despise thy brother, despise thy sister, and thy cursed cursed earth.

In despair Hali turns to Isha: "Should I despair of thy grace, Lord!" Hali would race beyond evil and good, beyond the dichotomies of earth-life,—beyond man and god, beyond good and evil. The sole reality would be Rooh's love deathless after death, love immaculate imperishable invincible. Like Dante addressing Beatrice, Hali apostrophizes Rooh:

... and no more parting, but all things and beings part of thee, thou deathless changeless Spirit! ever of mercy, ever beloved! all shapes and forms merged unto thee, thus Isha, thus Rahu, all unto thy infinite tenderness ...

After such knowledge, such a blinding blaze of revelation, Rahu must needs acknowledge defeat: "Thou hast triumphed, Hali. Thou art free! Free of Isha, free of Rahu!" But Hali would go further, and asks Rahu to be himself converted to Hali, a blazing brazier of Love: "O, be of my form, Rahu! forbearing friend! and say to my brothers, and say to my sisters, all things of love and all things of beauty are theirs, theirs to be!"

The answer to the lusts and violences of the world is love, love alone; and how difficult, how impossible, it is to find such love, or to retain such love, in this world! One has to die almost to gain or deserve such love, such love that alters not when it alteration finds. Rooh is dead, and Hali is dead, yet their love is not dead; and death, he takes all away, but love he cannot take. Was Desani thinking of the tragic partition of India—of homes uprooted, of lives blasted, of loves taunted—when this play was in gestation? Did he intend it as a balm to the ailing sorrowing Mother? It is the singular merit of this poem-play that all is insinuated, and nothing is merely stated so as to jar in one's surface consciousness. Hali and Rooh are

images of humanity tearing at its barbed limitations and straining towards the eternal, the infinite.

During the last decade, Asif Currimbhoy has published four volumes of plays, averaging a play per year: *The Tourist Mecca*, *The Clock*, *The Doldrummers*, *The Dumb Dancer*, *OM*, *Thorns on a Canvas*, *The Restaurant*, *The Captives*, *Goa*, *Abbe Faria*. There is no doubt Currimbhoy has a flair for playwriting. He can contrive interesting situations, his dialogues are arresting, and he has a sense of atmosphere; and his plays are actable. The one play that acquired a special notoriety of its own—because the censors in Bombay wouldn't pass it till their hands were forced by a Court judgement—is *The Doldrummers*. Currimbhoy had to find an outlet for his resentment in *Thorns on a Canvas*, which is a screaming protest against censorship. In *The Doldrummers*, a set of young men and women in the doldrums are caught in predicaments sad and funny in a shack at Juhu Beach, and tragedy is precipitated at last. Rita and Liza, Joe and Tony—the four down-and-outs, the 'doldrummers'—play at love and sex and poetry and futility and pathos; but these waifs and wastrels are nevertheless basically human. Anything could happen in this strange and sinister world, and many things do happen. Joe is drowned, and Rita is left with his child in her womb and his ring as a scalding memory.

The Dumb Dancer is a powerful study of a Kathakali dancer who so completely identifies himself with the character of Bhima that it leads him from one misapprehension to another, one disaster to another. Prema the mental asylum Superintendent begins to take more than a professional interest in him, and engineers with insane but clinical precision a gruesome tragedy. The play is indeed an eerie study of abnormal psychology. *OM* is a play of yet another kind: a philosophical play. It tries to dramatise certain historic attitudes in India to the problem of the quest of the 'self'. Young Man, Young Woman, Old Man—the three prototypical figures—interchange roles in the three plays. Transmigration and rebirth are implied, and the quest is continued, though the goal proves elusive. Self-deception is stronger than the pursuit of the 'self' as the ultimate Truth. Veils and veils are torn, and Guru and

Disciple alike stand nakedly exposed. Currimbhoy draws freely upon Vedic and Upanishadic lore in his attempt to make the play a panoramic sweep of India's spiritual quest; but, notwithstanding its technical virtuosity, the play's intention remains blurred. Of the other plays, *The Tourist Mecca* makes capital out of the background of the Taj. *The Clock* has almost a touch of Ionesco. *The Captives*, with its background of the Chinese invasion, studies the tension in the mind of a Muslim as he is caught between two worlds. While Asif Currimbhoy's resourcefulness and slick efficiency as a playwright are unquestionable, he creates the impression that he is as yet only testing his strength before he can feel ready to embark on something really worthwhile.

Lakhan Deb's *Tiger-Claw* (1967) is a three-act play in verse on the controversial killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. In his candid Preface, Lakhan Deb says that, even when "the death-warrant of English is signed by the political executioners", English will continue to be loved in many Indian homes "for her wealth of active verbs and subtle charms of expression, her flexible syntax and semantic power"; and being so loved, English "will grow under the warmth of the Indian Sun and in the showers of the Indian monsoon". The Shivaji-Afzal Khan theme has elements of pure drama, and Lakhan Deb has presented a credible enough Shivaji whose heroic stature and essential nobility are hardly affected by the grim necessity that drives him to deal with his adversary in the way he does. While the subsidiary characters make for variety, the issue really is between the two protagonists. The clue to Shivaji's incomparable success as a fighter and leader is given here:

Mother, it will never be said of Shivaji
That he winged himself like a moth on the flame;
Or walked into a trap for a succulent bait;
Tied himself into knots by tactical blunders;
Or failed to take a calculated risk;
Or was ever guilty of a strategic sin . . .

While he is shrewd and ruthless in giving a fight, he is also magnanimous in his moment of victory. He compares the true patriot to "a sandal tree of fragrant frame", but the traitor grows like

the prolific cactus
Spiked with thorns, malodorous and bearing
Prickly, astringent fruit.

Short plays and one-act plays of varying quality appear in journals and magazines, and it is impossible to keep track of them; it is likely a few good playlets, along with numberless bad ones, have been covered up by oblivion. It is very seldom that plays appear in book form. And of the plays lying buried in old books and magazines, few seem to have had a chance on the stage. Some of the poets of yesterday tried verse dramas too, more poems than dramas, in fact: Uma Maheswer's *Buddha* and *Sita in Her Sorrows*; V. Saranathan's *Indrajit*; B. N. Saletore's *Savitri*; V. N. Bhushan's *Samyukta* and *Anklet Bells*; Manjeri Isvaran's *Hira Bai* and *Yama and Yami*. Of full-length plays, K. S. Ramaswami Sastri's *Droupadi* is a retelling of the epic story, while D. M. Borgaonkar's *Image Breakers* is a problem play on the institution of marriage. Amarendra's English version of V. Chandrasekharam's *Kanchanamala* portrays the Phedre-like Tishyarakshita, Emperor Asoka's wife, whose incestuous love for her step-son brings about the tragedy. Krishna Gorowara has published in recent years a number of short plays in journals: *The Way Up*, *And A-Mourning Do We Go*, *Call It a Day*, *Refineries Unlimited*, and *Indo-Anglians in Anglia*. Krishna Gorowara has an eye for comedy and satire, and she specialises in urban sophistication, its poses, quirks, negations and self-deceptions. In *And A-Mourning Do We Go*, the chatter of the sophisticated folk and the vehemence of the angry young women are contrasted with the silent anguish of the paralytic girl, Tarveen. *Indo-Anglians in Anglia* is about the rootless Indians in England, the mimics who wander about like ghosts among the ruins!

Other recent successful plays—Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness*, a Commonwealth Festival play, Nissim Ezekiel's *Nalini*, *Marriage Poem* and *The Sleepwalkers* (1969), and Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1971)—comprise realism, comedy, tragi-comedy, farce and historical play. 'Drama' too is now becoming a fruitfully cultivated field in Indo-Anglian literature.

Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi was no writer, properly so called, nor was he at any time particularly interested in the art of writing; but he had to write or talk a great deal (often in English), even as we have to walk or eat or breathe. The period between the two World Wars and comprising them both was the Gandhian Age in India, our modern 'Heroic Age' (for so the late C. R. Reddy once called it). At the end of the first World War, there was a general feeling of frustration in India because of unrealized hopes. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms seemed to many a shell without substance, and thinking people felt that it would be idle to seek to discover in all that "statutory hypocrisy the germs of self-government". The Muslims, too, were disappointed with the treatment that had been meted out to Turkey at the Versailles Peace Conference. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre of people who had gathered to make a peaceful demonstration but poured fresh oil on the flame of discontent till it burst into a blinding blaze of national agony and resentment. It was the phoenix hour, and Gandhi the Mahatma gave the signal, and a whole nation awoke from its suspended animation and felt the blood-streams of a new life coursing through its veins. It was as though Gandhi had said: "Awake, arise, and realize this truth. I give you *abhaya*, fearlessness. You are slaves no more. Awake and realize the truth that you are free!" In C. F. Andrews's words, "in a sudden movement her (India's) fetters began to be loosened, and the pathway of freedom was opened". Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life—politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature—acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue. Thus it was that Gandhi exercised a potent influence on our languages and literatures, both directly through his own writings in English

and Gujarati and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice. The several regional languages acquired a new versatility and power, and many of the political leaders of the Gandhian Age—for example, C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), N. C. Kelkar, Abul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Jawaharlal Nehru and Vinoba Bhave—were themselves thinkers, writers, agitators and social reformers rolled into one. No apology is needed therefore for considering Gandhi as a writer and as a formative influence on the writers of his time.

The greatness of Gandhi was no sudden overwhelming greatness but rather the greatness of an ordinary man who through a long process of trial and error, aspiration and endeavour, achieved a greatness indubitably his own. The story of his 'Experiments with Truth'—for so he described the unfolding of this process—is one of the imperishable classics of our time. It originally appeared week by week in Gujarati in *Navajivan* and in English in *Young India* and it was issued in book form in 1925. In the Introduction to the latter, Gandhi explained:

My experiments in the political field are now known, not only to India, but to a certain extent to the 'civilized' world. For me, they have not much value; and the title of 'Mahatma' that they have won for me has, therefore, even less. Often the title has deeply pained me; and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me. But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field.

In this autobiographical record as also in his *Satyagraha in South Africa* may be found described in candid detail the events and circumstances of his life from birth to the launching of the non-cooperation movement in India in 1920. In the last instalment of the narrative, Gandhi wrote taking leave of his readers:

To describe truth, as it has appeared to me, and in the exact manner in which I have arrived at it, has been my ceaseless effort. The exercise has given me ineffable mental peace ...

But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action: to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. I know that I have not in me as yet that triple purity, in spite of constant ceaseless striving for it. That is why the world's praise fails to move me, indeed it often stings me ...

Gandhi saw no point in continuing the story beyond 1920 because it was already known to the public, his life having been lived (however unwillingly) in the limelight, in the continual blaze of controversy and political action. The latter part of Gandhi's life till he fell at the hands of an assassin on 30 January 1948 on his way to prayer was in considerable measure the life of the nation as well. As he grew in stature, the nation grew in self-consciousness and strength, and so he was verily the Father of the Nation that celebrated the baptism of its rebirth in freedom on 15 August 1947.

Born on 2 October 1869 at Porbander, Kathiawad, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had his early schooling at Rajkot, and married Kasturba in 1883. Having matriculated in 1887, he sailed for England next year to study law. Returning to India in 1891 after being called to the bar, he started practising at Rajkot and Bombay, but sailed for South Africa two years later as counsel for an Indian firm. It irked him to be subjected to all kinds of colour discrimination, and he therefore organized the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. In 1896 he paid a brief visit to India, and took his wife and two children with him back to Natal. The Boer War found him organizing an Ambulance Corps for the British. After a further prolonged visit to India where he studied the political situation at close quarters, he returned once more to South Africa and established a weekly paper, *Indian Opinion*. A chance reading of *Unto This Last* by Ruskin made a profound impression on Gandhi, as he has himself acknowledged in his Autobiography:

The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it. . . . I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book ...

I believed that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life ...

The teachings of *Unto This Last* I understood to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as day-light for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.

He organized the Phoenix Settlement near Durban, and later the Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg, the idea being that everyone should labour and draw the same wage and promote the common good of all (*sarvodaya*). An acquaintance with Tolstoy's and Thoreau's seminal writings made Gandhi now develop his technique of Passive Resistance (*satyagraha*), and he began his first Satyagraha campaign in 1906 at Johannesburg, and was jailed in 1908.

All this reading, thinking, and experimenting with truth culminated presently in the composition of *Hind Swaraj* in Gujarati, soon translated into English with the title *Indian Home Rule*. In the Appendix to this book Gandhi listed six of Tolstoy's writings ('The Kingdom of God is Within You', 'What is Art?', 'The Slavery of Our Times', 'The First Step', 'How Shall We Escape?', and 'Letter to a Hindoo'), Thoreau's 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' and 'Life Without Principle', Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and *A Joy for Ever*, Mazzini's *Duties of Man*, Edward Carpenter's 'Civilization, Its Cause and Cure', Max Nordau's 'Paradoxes of Civilization', Plato's 'Life and Death of Socrates', Dadabhai Naoroji's 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India' and Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Economic History of India*. Evidently Gandhi had anxiously sought corroboration for his innermost convictions in the writings of others so that he might not be misled himself or mislead his countrymen. His reading was selective, not voracious, and his mind was a rich receptive soil to the seeds of creative thought that aimed at the regeneration of man. *Hind Swaraj* is verily the *locus classicus* among Gandhi's writings. It is cast in the form

of twenty brief dialogues between 'Reader' and 'Editor' (Gandhi himself, who was the *de facto* editor of *Indian Opinion*), and covers subjects such as India and England, Italy and India, Civilization, Swaraj, machinery, Hindu-Muslim unity, law and medicine, education, violence and *ahimsa*, and the doctrine and practice of Satyagraha. In a later edition brought out at Madras 10 years after its first publication, Gandhi indicated that his views were unchanged and that he still believed that the way of Satyagraha shown in the book was "the only true way to Swaraj. Satyagraha, the law of love, is the law of life. Departure from it leads to disintegration. A firm adherence to it leads to regeneration". In his Prefatory Note, C. Rajagopalachari said:

There can be no reconstruction or hope for this land of ours, unless we eradicate the worship of force in all its forms, and establish work on a basis other than violence. A refutation of the doctrine of violence is, in the present situation of the affairs of our country, more necessary than ever.

What Gandhi thought and said and did during the last forty years (1908-1948) of his life merely flowed from the spring that was *Hind Swaraj*. It is there that we hear Gandhi talking—a very Moses from an eminence—in the accents of urgency and certitude. Thus of 'Western' civilization:

Civilization is like a mouse gnawing while it is soothing us. When its full effect is realized, we will see that religious superstition is harmless compared to that of modern civilization. I am not pleading for a continuance of religious superstitions. We will certainly fight them tooth and nail, but we can never do so by disregarding religion.

How did the ancient Indians project the unity of India before the people? Gandhi offered a rather unusual answer:

What do you think could have been the intention of those far-seeing ancestors of ours who established Sethubandhu Rameshwar in the South, Juggernath in the South-East, and Haridwar in the North as places of pilgrimage? . . . They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their homes. But they saw that India was one undivided

land so made by Nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world.

Gandhi was the apostle of decentralization, for he thought that the village was the safe sane unit of human association, while the city was but a hideous cancerous growth that bred evil fast and spread pestilence faster and faster:

We notice that the mind is a restless bird: the more it gets the more it wants; and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. . . . The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. . . . They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance, and that people would not be happy in them. . . . They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages. They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereign of the earth to be inferior to the Rishis and the Fakirs.

The most explosive passage in *Hind Swaraj*, however, related to the doctrine of Passive Resistance:

Passive Resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering: it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. . . . If I do not obey the law, and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self . . .

Isn't Passive Resistance an 'act of cowardice'? But Gandhi asked the counter-questions:

Wherein is courage required—in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and to be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior—he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend or he who controls the death of others?

As for the discipline that a passive resister needed, Gandhi stressed the importance of chastity, voluntary poverty, truthful-

ness and fearlessness. Chastity and poverty (or non-possession) were essential because sexual vice and love of money were deadly poisons: "A snake-bite is a lesser poison than these two, because the former merely destroys the body, but the latter destroy body, mind and soul". Truth and fearlessness, of course, were basic to the passive resister, as may be seen from the word coined later, 'Satyagraha' (the Force that is born of Truth, the Fearlessness that is inseparable from Truth). In the concluding chapter comes the astonishing statement:

If the English vacated India bag and baggage . . . it is possible that those who are forced to observe peace under their pressure would fight after their withdrawal. There can be no advantage in suppressing an eruption; it must have its vent. If, therefore, before we can remain at peace, we must fight among ourselves, it is better that we do so. There is no occasion for a third party to protect the weak. It is this so-called protection which has unnerved us. . . . I would paraphrase the thought of an English divine and say that anarchy under home rule were better than orderly foreign rule.

Thirty-five years later, in 1942, Gandhi was to tell the British: "Quit India, and leave us to God or anarchy". In August 1947, anarchy it was for a time in Delhi and in the Punjab; that terrible eruption had to have its vent. Gandhi wasn't deluding himself; there was at no time either faint-heartedness or self-deception in what he said. According to his lights he saw the disease clearly, prescribed the only drastic remedy that he could think of, and he was prepared to face the consequences.

The germs of the Gandhian political, economic, educational and ethical thought were already present in *Hind Swaraj*, and they called only for a little amplification or modification under the stress of actual events from time to time. The 'summing-up' gathered the threads of the discussion into a tremendous knot of affirmation and action:

1. Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control.
2. The way to it is passive resistance, that is, soul-force or love-force.
3. In order to exert this force, Swadeshi in every sense is necessary.
4. What we want to do should be done not because we object

to the English ... but because it is our duty to do so ... I bear no enmity towards the English ...

Self-rule, self-mastery and self-realization come first; and these called for inner purification through celibacy or chastity (brahmacharya), dietic restrictions, fasting, silence, prayer, the adoption of a simple life, the ready acceptance of manual labour, the cultivation of fearlessness and Truth, and the voluntary rejection of material possessions. Not an easy path, of course, this steady ascent to the Satyagrahi's peak of realization.

Although Gandhism is no closed system or dogma, it does involve an anxious concern for means, and it does take its stand on a firm faith in God. Of ends and means Gandhi thought a good deal, and he once remarked that, while God has given us some limited control over the means, we have none over the ends. He said again that, in his philosophy of life, ends and means were convertible, meaning that the far vision and the near vision are complementary, and one shouldn't be set up against the other. In another place, he declared that, if we took care of the means, we were bound to reach the end sooner or later. Keep your hands clean *now*; the future will look after itself! "The idea of non-violence states", says Werner Heisenberg, "that it is the quality of the means, e.g. the intention to suffer for the good ends but not to inflict suffering upon others, which provides the justification of the ends". But even to keep one's hands clean, God's Grace is needed as much as personal effort; for the Creator has given us only qualified control over the means. The distant goal is a necessary lure, but there is no easy short-cut to it; present actuality cannot be ignored, and personal moral responsibility must not be cast aside in the eagerness to reach the desired (or desirable) goal.

The Gandhian theory and practice of Satyagraha directly issued from this acute sense of personal moral responsibility for our day to day actions, irrespective of the distant goals. Dr. Stanley Jones writes that it was in 1893, when Gandhi was walking up and down on the railway platform (having been ejected by a white fellow-traveller from a first class com-

partment), that he conceived the idea of Satyagraha by rehearsing to himself:

I won't hate you, but I won't obey you when you are wrong. Do what you like. I will match my capacity to suffer against your capacity to inflict the suffering—my Soul-force against your physical force. I will wear you down by goodwill.

But what exactly is this "soul-force"? No 'technique' to be learned in a gymnasium, no 'gadget' to be bought in the super-bazaar, Soul-force is really spiritual power. As Rajaji says:

The moral energy, Soul-force as Gandhiji loved to call it, comes from Faith and true religious devotion. . . . The *Gita* tells us (xviii, 61) that the Lord dwells in the heart of every being and by His power moves all beings who are set like marionettes on the machine. The secret presence of God in the hearts of all beings is the secret of Satyagraha. It was not the application of a new technique but the understanding of ancient spiritual teaching and firm faith in its truth. Satyagraha is not for the sceptic. . .

And Karl Jaspers puts it not very differently when he says that Satyagraha is "the firm holding-of-the-self on Being, on Truth". In short, Satyagraha is not just a matter of expediency, a convenient instrument of political action; it is the dynamic of moral action sustained by religious faith—faith in God.

During one of his periods of stay in a British jail in India, Gandhi made a number of translations of Indian lyrics into English, some of which were later adapted for publication by John S. Hoyland with the title *Songs from Prison* (1934). The pieces are from the Veda and the Upanishads, from the *Mukundamala*, and from *bhaktas* like Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabir, Nanak, Mirabai and Tukaram. The following is from the ancient Sanskrit:

Soul is a warrior:

Body is his chariot,

Reason is the charioteer,

Intellect the reins:

The senses are his steeds,

Through grassy plains of sense-known things they bear him:

But Soul must rule.

It is interesting to note that Robert Bridges, in his *The Testament of Beauty*, makes 'Selfhood' and 'Breed' the two steeds drawing the human chariot, while 'Ethick' is the charioteer. And Sri Aurobindo, describing the true Karmayogin, has used a similar symbol:

The Charioteer of Kurukshetra driving the car of Arjuna over the field of ruin is the image and description of Karmayoga: for the body is the chariot and the senses are the horses of the driving and it is through the blood-stained and mire-sunk ways of the world that Sri Krishna pilots the soul of man to Vaikuntha.

There were, indeed, many parallels between Gandhi's thoughts on swaraj and swadeshi, self-mastery and passive resistance, and Sri Aurobindo's, although the latter's had a more pronounced spiritual accent whereas the former's had an obvious ethical accent. But both saw that mastery of the self had to come first and that it would be no easy canter to the goal. In another of his renderings from the Sanskrit, Gandhi recorded:

To traverse this pathway of life—
Thus they, the Sages, declare—
Is as hard as to walk on the edge of a razor.

This striking image of the ascent on the razor's edge sums up the nature of the struggle for achieving inner harmony and strength through the destruction of the falsity and evil within. Yet it is only on the foundation of this inner harmony and realization that the harmony without and realization on a national or global scale would be possible.

But how is the evil without to be fought and brought to bay and destroyed? The way of 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' cannot lead to a lasting harmony, for what is gained through force is constantly in danger of being lost through even greater force. The way of salvation would therefore be to meet the menace of evil, not with the weapon of *Duragraha*, but with *Satyagraha*, the Force of Love and Truth. Defiant sufferance would be better than destructive retaliation. Sufferance might awaken the other man's (the so-called enemy's) conscience and convert him to the way of love. On the other

hand, as R. L. Stevenson has reminded us, it is *our* right cheek we are to show when the left is hit, *not* advise the other fellow (the victim) to make this gesture. Gandhi also said that, if the higher courage of Satyagraha was not possible, even violent resistance would be preferable to cowardly acquiescence. In 1947, he advised Nehru and Patel to rush with arms to the defence of Kashmir since quick demoralization had set in there. But his faith in the ultimate power of Satyagraha was like a rock of adamant. Even during the dark days of October 1938, Gandhi advised the Czechs to resist Hitler *if they could* with the weapon of Satyagraha:

I present Dr. Benes with a weapon not of the weak but of the brave. There is no bravery greater than a resolute refusal to bend the knee to an earthly power, no matter how great, and that without bitterness of spirit and in the fullness of faith that the spirit alone lives, nothing else does.

To Gandhi, national realization included the ending of political subjection and economic degradation, the removal of social inequalities and abuses like untouchability, cast arrogance, occupational prejudices, etc., the reform of education, and giving new life to language and literature. These were, of course, largely inter-related problems, though they had to be attacked individually also. Satyagraha was to be the weapon that would win political freedom, and with it the other freedoms should come—and they would come only if the necessary effort were put forth. "It would be folly", he said in *Hind Swaraj*, "to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than an American Rockefeller". Therefore the fight on the political front was but a small part of the total fight that Gandhi felt bound to sustain throughout his life. Gandhi saw that, apart from the evil of foreign rule, two formidable evils held sway over the Indian people. These were Idleness, enforced or voluntary, and Poverty, self-wrought or imposed by others or by adverse circumstances. The cure for idleness was work, and the cure for poverty was, firstly, the mobilization of all existing resources, secondly, equitable distribution, and thirdly, limiting population growth through moral restraint or *brahmacharya*. He felt convinced that, whatever the effort,

Indians could never become, in strictly material terms, as rich a nation as the U.S.A. or Britain. The current slogan is: "Let us produce more and more, let us start heavy industries, let us produce a variety of consumer goods, let us mass-produce motor cars, radios, refrigerators, let us manufacture money in the printing presses, let us import reactors, turn out munitions, raise salaries, multiply ministries and embassies—and so let us all grow rich together"! Perhaps, all this is possible; perhaps the entire world—the white and the black, the brown and the yellow races—can *all* enjoy a standard of life equal to that now enjoyed by a few Western nations and by Japan among the Eastern. But Gandhi himself thought that this was not likely to happen. This mad process of wasting the earth's resources could not go on for ever. We should soon exhaust all our oil and coal, even all our lignite and monazite. A purely technological civilization was no doubt supreme in the arts of life, but it was alas! even more supreme in the arts of death. Gandhi therefore pleaded for simple living, because he thought it was wise living. He pleaded for India's village industries, because he thought they would avoid the peculiarly ruthless forms of exploitation and misery inherent in large-scale factory production. Must we dismiss Gandhian economics as being rooted in a past that is no more? Was Gandhi wrong in reminding us that the village, after all, held the key to the prosperity of the mass of the Indian people? Was he unwise to warn us against the evils of massive industrialization? Was he merely old-fashioned because he measured the value of technological change with the yardstick of its effect on the countryside? In his excellent paper, *The Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (1959), Dr. Kenneth Rivett makes a careful study of various aspects of Gandhian economics and concludes thus:

As a final synthesis, Gandhi's thought is unacceptable. Seen, however, in the context of India's problems—which in varying degree are those of all Eastern Asia—there is far more to be said for it than is generally realized . . .

Gandhi's essential insight was that the Indian village has a high power of recuperation; his programme was to help that process and not to hinder it. . . . The constructive side of his thought is mainly

sound. The critical side is weak, but even this rests on an assessment of the impact of industrialism on India that is largely correct.

Like Gandhi's economic insights, his educational insights too had a fundamental sanity of their own, especially in the context of the largely rural character of India and the chronic economic backwardness of the people. Soon after the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, Gandhi put forward a scheme that placed the main emphasis on education through a basic craft. One of the undesirable consequences of the British system of education had been the creation of an 'educated middle class', divorced from the hard actualities of life in the country. Aversion to all forms of manual work was a byproduct of this education, and this in turn led to what Rajagopalachari has aptly called "the stupidities of the middle class". If Tagore said at Shantiniketan, 'Live and Learn', Gandhiji said, 'Do and learn'. 'Basic' education was meant to make the child participate in the creative life of the region—the local crafts, industries and occupations—and acquire an intimate understanding of his environment. Through such purposeful participation and understanding the child was expected to cultivate self-reliance and develop a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community. And if education was to touch the heart, the soul, it had to give primacy to the mother tongue, and therefore written or spoken language should alike aim at the ideal of directness and simplicity so that what is said might prove an invitation and a challenge even to a child.

With self-realization and progressive world-realization would come Sarvodaya, the splendid fulfilment in the personal, social, national and international spheres of the art of simple and wise living, benefiting all and exploiting none. And Sarvodaya was to be no distant inaccessible Utopia but the practicable unfoldment of a full and happy life for India's (and the world's) teeming millions.*

* Sarvodaya literally means the rise, the good, of all—including the good of the enemy and the evil-doer. The Sarvodaya movement aims at the creation of what Gandhi or Tolstoy would call the non-violent society, a social order based on the principle of love, and brought about by the means of non-resistance or non-violence or love. (Jaya-prakash Narayan, at the Tolstoy Seminar in Venice, June-July 1960).

Gandhi's ideas make no dead rigid system; as Vinoba Bhave once remarked, "If Communism is a solid and imposing structure of granite, Gandhism is an ever-changing amoeba". And yet, for a man who spoke and wrote so often and so much—there are several thousands of speeches, articles, letters, and records of interviews and conversations—there is a surprising background consistency in his ideas that goes back at least to *Hind Swaraj*. Like Thoreau and Tolstoy, Gandhi too thought that modern civilization was making a mad jump towards self-destruction; but he also thought that the movement could be arrested if mankind made a determined effort in time. The Gandhian Seminar that was held in New Delhi about fifteen years ago and was attended by an international team consisting, among others, of Lord Boyd-Orr, Prof. Tucci, Madame Cecilia Merieles, Dr. Daffri, Acharya Kripalani and Humayun Kabir, reached certain broad conclusions regarding the Gandhian approach to personal, national and international problems. On the individual plane, mastery of the self through freedom from hatred and fear would be the way of salvation; on the national plane, all inner tensions must cease through the elimination of the lust for power and the mania to dominate other men; and, on the international plane, the use of violence should be given up once and for all, and disputes should be resolved through the ways of peaceful negotiation.

As we dwell on the phenomenon of Gandhi's life and martyrdom, we come to realize at last that he was indeed a Mahatma, that for him there was no hiatus between private morality and public policy, between ethics and politics, between material and spiritual health. Endowed with something akin to a sixth sense, he inferred our deep-rooted ills and prescribed simple remedies to end them. He didn't think that the wand of science and technology would work the same wonders in a subcontinent like India afflicted (or blessed) with an ever increasing population as in smaller or more fortunately situated countries like Britain, Canada or the U.S.A. The aim of human life is happiness, not luxurious living; and true happiness is won only through work and good fellowship, and the expulsion of cowardice and violence from our hearts. If humanity is not to commit racial suicide by overreaching

its possibilities through a blind mad pursuit of technological power, we should learn before it should prove to be too late to minimize our demands on life, cast away all surplus luggage, and pursue the ways of simplicity, sobriety and generous understanding. The Gandhian ethic, while it is no doubt rooted in the Indian tradition, has its close affiliations with the Christian tradition as well. The Gandhian way is the stern humanistic way, because its aim is to arrive at the health and strength of the aggregate by fostering the health and strength of the individual units. It is the sane ambrosial way, because it seeks to build the edifice of humanity's future, not on the quicksands of perpetual technological advance and global industrial strife, but on the durable foundations of love, truth, chastity, honest labour, equitable sharing, simple living and the uncompetitive ordering of national and international affairs. And we can spurn the Gandhian way only if we are sure that there is a better or surer way to human salvation.

Such was Gandhi the prophet who espoused truth and defied violence, banished fear and unfurled the flag of Sarvodaya. His arrival on the Indian political scene meant a revolution in our ways of life and thought. It was not just a question of one leader displacing another; the entire outlook itself seemed to undergo an extraordinary change. Politics came out—even more decisively than in the preceding Age of Tilak and Besant—from the conference hall and committee room into the wide open spaces where the masses were striving with their destinies. Gandhi was a man speaking to men; he was more than an agitator or politician, he was the liberator, the Messiah, the Great Soul. If he was the 'Mahatma', he was also 'Bapu', everybody's friend and mentor. He asked, not for votes or for intellectual approbation alone, but for sacrifices. As Jesus had exhorted, Gandhi too asked his followers to give up everything and follow him. Some of the leading lawyers in the country—Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Rajendra Prasad, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, C. Rajagopalachari, T. Prakasam—gave up their princely practice to join Gandhi's movement of non-cooperation with the British bureaucracy. Thousands of students gave up their studies. The Hindus and Muslims worked for a time together as one band of noble brothers. There was a stir of expectancy in the air.

As instruments of mass action, Gandhi forged the weapons of Satyagraha and civil disobedience, hartal and bonfire of foreign cloth. In the immediate context, of course, the promised result ('Swaraj in one year!') eluded realization. But there was no question regarding the long-range results of the campaign. Fear had miraculously left the people. Physical might had ceased to daunt them. They knew that, although freedom might be delayed, it could not be withheld for ever. What makes the slave is not the prison, not poverty, nor physical debility, but fear; and when fear left the people, they were already free—potentially free.

Gandhi the speaker, the writer, used language—be it Gujarati, English or Hindi—as a necessary tool, just as he used his spectacles, his walking stick, or his safety razor. Writing with him was not for writing's sake, nor speaking for speaking's sake, but rather for achieving communication, for conveying information, for converting people to his point of view. In South Africa, he made *Indian Opinion* his mouthpiece and engine of action. *Young India* (and, later, *Harijan*) served a similar purpose in India. Beginning with a circulation of less than 2500 in 1919 when Gandhi took it over, *Young India* steadily waxed in power and prestige, and at the time of his arrest in March 1922, its weekly sale was nearly 40,000. And this circulation was achieved without the adventitious aid of advertisements. But neither the five-figure circulation of his paper nor the crowds that always gathered to hear him offered a correct index to the power he somehow managed to put behind his words. Gandhi had neither the time nor the inclination to cultivate the so-called art of writing or speaking. He merely wrote or spoke straight on, and when we read them today the words *seem* to be often insipid or anaemic, with no straining after emphasis, no colour, no irradiating brilliance. Yet they are Gandhi's words, and their very bareness constitutes their strength. Words by themselves are nothing, just as a row of numbers means nothing unless we know where the decimal point is placed; the decimal point is the power of the personality of the writer or speaker. With Gandhi came a break with the old Macaulayan tradition of public speaking and formal writing. But Gandhi's mastery of language, however deceptively or disarmingly bare and

simple, was never less than adequate to the place, mood or occasion. In the celebrated Benares University Speech of 4 February 1916, Gandhi lashed right and left, much as Jesus chased the money-changers out of the temple. It was evidently spoken extempore:

I want to think audibly this evening. I do not want to make a speech, and if you find me this evening speaking without reserve, pray, consider that you are only sharing the thoughts of a man who allows himself to think audibly ...

Actually he dealt a series of lathi-blows on Indian and British alike, and the distinguished assembly which included Lord Hardinge the Viceroy, Annie Besant (who presided), and titled dignitaries and Maharajas, was more than scandalized and the meeting rather ended abruptly before Gandhi could finish his speech. It is by no means a very orderly presentation of ideas, nor is there much delicacy in the phrase; but, then, one cannot make a lathi-charge with delicacy. Gandhi's targets are hypocrisy, exploitation, physical and mental sloth. The elaborate security regulations irk him and exasperate him:

All of us have had many anxious moments while the Viceroy was going through the streets of Benares. There were detectives stationed in many places. We were horrified. We asked ourselves: 'Why this distrust? Is it not better that even Lord Hardinge should die than live a living death?'

What a way of putting things! But more is to follow, equally unconventional and explosive:

We may foam, we may fret, we may resent, but let us not forget that India of today in her impatience has produced an army of anarchists. I myself am an anarchist, but of another type. But there is a class of anarchists amongst us, and if I am able to reach this class, I would say to them that their anarchism has no room in India, if India is to conquer the conqueror. It is a sign of fear. If we trust and fear God, we shall have to fear no one, not Maharajas, not Viceroys, not the detectives, not even King George. I honour the anarchist for his love of the country. I honour him for his bravery in being willing to die for his country ...

Gandhi is but speaking like Gandhi: the great patriot, the great humanitarian, who is also the apostle of Ahimsa and the prophet of Satyagraha. But the words cause a flutter on the platform even as they thrill the student congregation. Mrs. Besant, as President, tries helplessly to steer the speaker clear of dangerous corners. But Gandhi goes his own way. He will not spare anybody. In an earlier part of the speech, he had referred to the condition of the Benares temple:

It is right that the lanes of our sacred temple should be as dirty as they are? The houses round about are built anyhow. The lanes are tortuous and narrow. If even our temples are not models of roominess and cleanliness, what can our self-government be?

And now he makes a withering reference to the exhibition of pomp and luxury by the assembled Maharajas:

His Highness the Maharaja, who presided yesterday over our deliberations, spoke about the poverty of India. Other speakers laid great stress on it. But what did we witness in the great *pandal* in which the foundation ceremony was performed by the Viceroy? Certainly a most gorgeous show, an exhibition of jewellery which made a splendid feast for the eyes of the greatest jeweller who chose to come from Paris. I compare with the richly bedecked noblemen the millions of the poor. And I feel like saying to the noblemen: 'There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen in India'.

This is dropping, not a single brick or two, but whole brick-kilns into the assembly. Never before had such a thing happened—is it a portent, is it the first ringing of the knell of a parting old order? What are the Very Important Persons on the dais, what is Mrs. Besant herself, to do with such a mad-cap as Gandhi! Towards the end of the unconcluded speech, Gandhi refers to "the atmosphere of sycophancy and falsity that surrounds" the members of the Indian Civil Service so as effectively to demoralize them, and taking a sudden turn in the argument he makes the ominous statement:

If we are to receive self-government we shall have to take it. We shall never be granted self-government. Look at the history of the British Empire and the British nation; freedom-loving as it is, it will

not be a party to give freedom to a people who will not take it themselves. Learn your lessons, if you wish to, from the Boer War. Those who were enemies of that empire only a few years ago, have now become friends ...

That is the end,—arbitrarily brought about by a movement on the dais and the resulting confusion. Yet, at this distance of time, it is difficult to see how Gandhi could have better concluded his amazing address. Freedom will not be 'given' as a free gift; it has to be deserved, and 'taken'; but once this has happened, there will be peace and friendship between those who had earlier been ranged against each other. Candid, brave, uncompromising, truthful, and, above all, prophetic, the Benares speech stands at the head of Gandhi's revolutionary career in India, setting the tone to the utterances and actions of the following hectic decades culminating in 'Quit India' and independence and the martyrdom on the evening of Friday, 30 January 1948. Gandhi is no more of India only, but belongs to the whole world, even as a Jesus or a Buddha belongs to all humanity. Only the other day Professor Vivian de Sola Pinto said at Nottingham that whereas St. George had become a patron saint by killing a dragon, Gandhi had *converted* a dragon—"and it is much more difficult to convert a dragon than to kill one"; and he endorsed Lord Altrincham's suggestion that Gandhi should become the patron saint of the Commonwealth.¹

Perhaps, the peak-point of Gandhi's career in India was neither the explosive Benares speech nor yet the apotheosis of the last years and the crowning martyrdom and the subsequent canonization, but rather the years of the early twenties when the Gandhian image first shone like a beacon in the murky political atmosphere in India and the world. When he launched the non-cooperation movement, he clashed with many, including Rabindranath Tagore himself. Gandhi's reply entitled 'The Great Sentinel' is among the classics of English prose, and there is not one unsure sentence or inapt word from the beginning to the end. How dignified is the exordium:

¹ The reference is to a speech made by Professor Pinto at the time of the Indian Republic Day celebration by students in January 1959 in the University of Nottingham.

The Bard of Shantiniketan has contributed to the *Modern Review* a brilliant essay on the present movement. It is a series of word pictures which he alone can paint ...

Gandhi will make what admissions he can, and in quite generous terms; but as regards Tagore's main thesis about non-cooperation, Gandhi is unrepentant and adamant. The nimble steel flashes and swirls its strength and brilliance, and one is transfixed as in a trance:

I do indeed ask the poet and the sage to spin the wheel as a sacrament. When there is war, the poet lays down his lyre, the lawyer his law reports, the schoolboy his books. The poet will sing the true note after the war is over, the lawyer will have occasion to go to his law books when people have time to fight among themselves. When a house is on fire, *all* the inmates go out, and each one takes up a bucket to quench the fire. When all about me are dying for want of food, the only occupation permissible to me is to feed the hungry Our cities are *not* India. India lives in her seven and a half lakhs of villages, and the cities live upon the villages. They do not bring their wealth from other countries. The cities are brokers and commission agents for the big houses of Europe, America and Japan India is daily growing poorer. The circulation about her feet and legs has almost stopped. And if we do not care, she will collapse altogether. . . .

The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance. It is an indescribably painful state which has to be experienced to be realized. I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem—invigorating food. They cannot be given it. They must earn it. And they can earn it only by the sweat of their brow.

Food cannot be 'given', freedom cannot be 'given'; they have to be alike earned and taken. Yet this was the man wiseacres chose to dismiss as an impossible idealist inhabiting an inaccessible ivory tower!

Gandhi's statement at the conclusion of the 'Great Trial' on 18 March 1922 is another imperishable classic, and these words must for ever be carved in our racial memories:

... I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of government has become almost a passion with me. . . . I knew that I was

playing with fire. I ran the risk, and if I was set free, I would still do the same. . . . I wanted to avoid violence, I want to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed. But I had to take my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done irreparable harm to my country, or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips . . .

As N. C. Kelkar put it, Gandhi had indeed, like a skilful railway pointsman, "shunted the train of the trial from the track of vulgar terror to that of refined sublimity". Pilate sentenced the Mahatma to six years' simple imprisonment. The Mahatma was thus dead to the world in a civil sense, and C. R. Das and Rajagopalachari were fighting the issue between Swarajism and non-cooperation. But early in 1924, everything was forgotten except the fact that Gandhi was seriously ill. He was promptly removed from the Yeravada Jail to the Sassoon Hospital, and an urgent operation was performed upon him. The world was presently relieved to learn that Gandhi had stood the operation well and was firmly set on the road to recovery. After the operation, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri issued a moving statement:

In a few minutes he was shifted to the operation room. I sat outside marvelling at the exhibition I had witnessed of highmindedness, forgiveness, chivalry and love transcending ordinary human nature, and what a mercy it was that the non-cooperation movement should have had a leader of such serene vision and sensitiveness to honour.

'Bapu' is saved, saved for India, for all humanity. Everybody is grateful to Colonel Maddock for the promptness with which he has cut through masses of red tape and saved Gandhi's life. *Archanas* and *abhishekams* are performed at Tanjore, *japas* are organized at Benares; Muslim admirers from Nagore send *tabarruck* of some aulia, a Parsi sister offers her own blood for accelerating Gandhi's recovery. And as for letters and telegrams and congratulatory messages, Devdas Gandhi and Mahadev Desai are attending to them day and night. Government is itself affected, however tardily, by this prayerful mood and this atmosphere of universal friendliness, and orders the release of Gandhi unconditionally. The apt words for the climactic occasion are uttered by Gandhi's friend, C. F. Andrews:

There is a ruler of India here, in this hospital, Mahatma Gandhi, whose sway is greater than all imperial power. His name will be remembered and sung by the village people long after the names of the modern governors in their palaces in New Delhi are forgotten. When all the buildings of Raisina have crumbled into ruins, such as those around the Kutub Minar and Tughlakabad, the name of Mahatma Gandhi will still be taught by mothers to their little children as one of the greatest of India's saints and saviours.

For there is a spiritual palace which Mahatma Gandhi has built up out of an eternal fabric. Its foundations are deeply and truly laid in the Kingdom of God. No oppression of the poor has gone to build it, love and devotion to the poor are its golden decorations. No military pomp reigns within its borders, but only the peaceful harmony of human souls. . . . Its empire is the heart. . . . Let me keep pure the vision which God has given me. For when such a gift has come, there is nothing else in life except to hold it fast.

After his unconditional release from prison following the operation, Gandhi stood aloof for a period of about five years; then, with the march to Dandi and the inauguration of salt satyagraha, he had to assume effective leadership again. Two or three years later, he withdrew from active politics for another term till the second world war called him back and he felt compelled to launch the 'Quit India' movement of 1942, the third and last of his major campaigns in India. Freedom at last came, and with it the partition of the country which Gandhi wouldn't approve but also felt powerless to resist. What had happened? In his recent book *Gandhi: A Life* (1969), Krishna Kripalani writes:

In less than three decades since he (Gandhi) took command of the political struggle, he had brought the nation to the very gates of freedom. Seeing the gates about to open, there was a maddened rush to leap over the last hurdle. The unseemly scramble for prizes had begun. Sadly the wizard stepped aside, broke his magic wand and watched sorrowfully the desperate stampede, hordes rushing in, hordes fleeing out, some in glee, some in panic. How many would be trampled under? Would he himself be spared? He had no wish to be ...

The blood-boltered history of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 profoundly saddened Gandhi, and took away from him the desire to live. He still undertook purificatory fasts; he still per-

formed his miracles—at Calcutta, in August 1947, he was the “one-man boundary force” (in Lord Mountbatten’s words) that proved infinitely more effective than 55,000 soldiers in the Punjab—but he could hardly escape the feeling that, having won all the battles of freedom, he was losing, or he had lost, the vital battle of unity. The atmosphere of violence and untruth that enveloped him weakened his will to fight. He couldn’t act unless he knew the truth, and truth was difficult to get at. He commenced the last of his many fasts on 13 January 1948; it seemed to have some effect, but leonine violence was still in the air. After the first attempt on his life, Gandhi merely said: “Why are you afraid? What can be better than to die in the act of prayer?” It was as though he was expecting death any moment, and was ready for the event. And so when Godse fired the bullets at him on 29 January on his way to prayer, he died with the name of Rama on his lips. “When this dreadful thing happened”, said Lord Casey, “a particular sort of light went out of India”. It did, indeed.

Gandhi Literature

We have seen that Mahatma Gandhi was no systematic thinker or system-builder any more than Jesus was, though under the stress of experience or in spurts of intuition certain ideas sprang up, like sparks from the anvil, to which he gave memorable expression. Gandhi was no doubt primarily a man of God, but he was also a practical man who was more keen on doing the right thing under all conceivable circumstances than in making an exhibition of tight-rope dancing in the interests of theoretical consistency. Truth alone was his pole star, and he was content to act with his eyes unfalteringly turned to it; and the words he spoke—the ideas he expressed—are to be studied always in relation to his religion of Truth and his Karma Yoga.

Gandhi was a humanist and a man of religion more than a nationalist and patriot. Although he worked for the liberation of India from foreign rule, there was no hatred in his heart for the British. He hoped that Hindustani might one day become the lingua franca of the country, but he continued to write and speak in English and was fully sensible of the advantage of a knowledge of that great world language. He distrusted the machine, he took pleasure (like Thoreau) in walking, but he also conceded that the human body itself is the most wonderful of machines and he was not squeamish about travelling in a car or a train when necessary or convenient. He disliked gross economic inequalities, but he advocated a change of heart, not a mere change of masters. He pleaded for prohibition, but saw no harm in workers taking *neera* or sweet toddy. Sarvodaya was to Gandhi no mere dream and vision but something to be realized here and now.

With the Gandhian revolution in our political life, there came about also a revolution in our writing. Gandhi was not in sympathy with the view that art or literature was absolutely

autonomous, and was far more inclined to make it a handmaid to life. He once remarked in the course of a conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy: "Life must immensely exceed all the arts put together. For what is this hot-house art-plant of yours without the life-soul and background of a steady worthy life? ... what, after all, does this fussing with art amount to if it all the time stultifies life instead of elevating it?" Like Tolstoy, Gandhi too erred in denying art its particular autonomy and preeminence, but at least their views have been a corrective to some of the aberrations of those who hold that Art is for Art's sake alone or even that Life itself is only for Art's sake. On the other hand, their theories notwithstanding, Tolstoy was himself the creator of a world of imperishable values, while Gandhi readily responded to mystic poetry, and one of his favourite poems was *The Hound of Heaven*, to which at his request Rajaji prepared a gloss!

Indian publicists have had of necessity to be bilingual since the days of Raja Rammohan Roy, who wrote in Bengali as well as in English. Lokamanya Tilak edited the *Kesari* in Marathi and the *Mahratta* in English. Sri Aurobindo edited the *Bande-mataram* and the *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali. Gandhi likewise wrote both in Gujarati, his mother tongue, and in English. Under the influence of his example, writing in the various regional languages flourished as never before during the twenties and after, acquired a modern incisiveness and force, and went all out to reach the masses. But English writing in India suffered no set-back. Gandhi's own weekly papers, *Young India* and *Harijan*, were among the most widely read and discussed organs of public opinion. Although no great scholar, Gandhi knew very well the New Testament in English, and his writing in English had accordingly a simplicity, pointedness and clarity that was in refreshing contrast to the heaviness often characteristic of earlier Indian writing. Thanks to the Gandhian example, Indian writing in English became recognizably functional. Gone were the old Macaulayan amplitude and richness of phrasing and weight of miscellaneous learning. Gandhian writing was as bare and austere as was his own life; yet who will say that either the one or the other lacked the fullness of fulfilment?

As a rule, then, Indian writing and speaking in English since

the Gandhian revolution has tended to be wisely utilitarian, cultivating the virtues of clarity and directness and brevity rather than eloquence and elaboration and exuberance. There is a world of difference between the sonorous periods of Bepin Chandra Pal, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Surendranath Banerjea or the editorials in the *Hindu*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Leader* of some decades ago, and the speeches of Gandhi, Rajaji and Subhas Chandra Bose or the editorials in some of the leading English papers of today. Two extracts, chosen almost at random, may be cited to indicate this change in our habits of thinking and writing. The following is from Ambika Charan Mazumdar's presidential address before the Lucknow session (1916) of the Indian National Congress:

There are, however, those who say 'not yet'. Not yet! Then 'when'? —asks the Indian nationalist. But here the oracle is dumb and Echo only answers—'when'! Edwin Bevan's parable of 'the Patient and the Steel Frame' is cited and the people are strictly enjoined to lie in peace and possess their souls in patience until their political Nirvana is accomplished. Simile and metaphor are not safe guides in practical life, for all fables are but fallacies clothed in equivocal language which captivates the imagination and deludes the reason. For even the patient in the 'steel frame' requires a gradual relaxation and occasional readjustment of his splints and bandages and, above all, a steady, substantial improvement in his dietary arrangements, as after all it is the food and nourishment and not the splint and bandages, that are calculated to give him strength and cure him of his injuries. You cannot indefinitely keep him on milk and sago to help either the 'knitting of the bones' or the 'granulation of the flesh'. Our critics however would enjoin 'perfect quiet and repose' without prescribing any kind of diet until the people shall have, in their spirit of quiescence, fully recovered themselves in their steel frame. If any illustration were actually needed, one might fairly suggest that the case of either the swimmer or the rider would probably furnish a more apposite object lesson. You cannot expect the one to be an expert jockey without training him on the back of a horse, as you cannot expect the other to be an expert swimmer without allowing him to go into the water. There must be repeated falls and duckings before any efficiency can be attained by either. . . . There is a school for the lawyer, the physician, the educationist and the engineer where he can obtain his passport and begin his profession; but is there any school or college where an aspirant can be admitted to his degree for self-government? Is it through self-government that the art of self-government

can be either taught or acquired. In the words of Mr Gladstone, it is the institution of self-government, which constitutes the best training-ground for self-government.

This was typical of the old 'liberal' school of oratory: the speaker is a scholar, a lawyer, and he is addressing the educated, who can be expected to follow a laborious simile, recognize a quotation, and relish a reference to a British statesman of yesterday. The whole elaborately wrought piece of rhetoric boils down to this: "The British say that the time for transfer of power is 'not yet', because we are not experienced in the art of self-government. But unless we are first trusted with responsibility, how can we gain the experience?" Let me turn now to the following passage, also from a Congress Presidential Address. The speaker is Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhi's 'sword-arm' in the Congress, a former Ahmedabad lawyer, but essentially a peasant leader with a peasant's commonsense and sturdiness of character; the occasion is the Karachi Congress of 1931; and the theme is the future of India as a federation of the Indian Provinces and the native Princely States.

There is no receding from the Lahore resolution of Complete Independence. This independence does not mean, was not intended to mean, a churlish refusal to associate with British or any other power. Independence therefore does not exclude the possibility of equal partnership for mutual benefit and dissolvable at the will of either party. . . . Federation is a fascinating idea. But it introduces new embarrassments. Princes will not listen to severance. But if they will come in the true spirit, it will be a great gain. Their association must not be so to impede the progress of democracy. I hope therefore that they will not take up an uncompromising attitude that may be wholly inconsistent with the spirit of freedom. I wish they would without any pressure give us an earnest of their desire to march abreast of the time-spirit. Surely the fundamental rights of their subjects should be guaranteed as of the rest of the inhabitants of India.

This is, no doubt, matter-of-fact, business-like, and coldly colourless, but on closer scrutiny one realizes that not a point has been missed. One can now read in this bare bloodless passage the robust commonsense and steely strength that stood India in good stead during the dark dark days of 1947 and after. The Sardar not only agreed to the 'Indian Republic' re-

maining within the Commonwealth but also repeated the feat of a Bismarck and achieved with phenomenal astuteness and sense of urgency the integration of the 600 scattered princely States with the Indian Union.

To a certain extent, of course, this change in style—from the elaborate to the simple, from the ornate to the plain, from the opulent to the pointed—is nothing particularly unusual to Indian writing or speaking in English. Even in England, there has been witnessed a pronounced change from the massive Victorian oratory of Gladstone's during his Midlothian campaign to the packed urgencies of Churchill's speeches during the second World War. Here is another passage, a peroration in the old style, the speaker being Surendranath Banerjee, 'the Thunderer of Bengal'; the occasion is the unveiling of the portrait of Dadabhai Naoroji in the Cowasji Jehangir Hall, Bombay, in 1919:

The truest memorial that we can have of the illustrious dead is to raise tabernacles in our hearts in their honour, to devote ourselves to the worship of those principles which were theirs and to the furtherance of those aims which were their life-work. Then will these great men, emancipated from the fetters of flesh and blood, live in our midst in a higher form of existence and be imperishable guides in our outward march which must lead to the accomplishment of our highest destinies. Dadabhai Naoroji will be one of such leaders. You may have your busts, your statues, your portraits. They serve a useful purpose, they remind us of their mortal existence and of their imperishable work. But let not our reverence, our affection and our esteem be confined to mere dead forms, but let them be a living source of inspiration to us. Let them raise us to the higher atmosphere fragrant with the breath of these immortals and inspire us with a resolve to incorporate into our daily life the ideals which they have left for our instruction and guidance. Let us imprint upon our minds the lessons of sobriety, moderation, of lifelong devotion to the Mother Land which Naoroji has taught us. Then we shall have raised in his honour a memorial more lasting than brass or marble, a memorial transmissible from age to age, that will become the lasting heritage of our people in the rich possession of those moral qualities which are the truest guarantees of continued and undying national progress.

The laboured tone of high seriousness is unmistakable, the exhortation has a rounded fullness and amplitude, and the sentiments are solemnly tuned to the occasion. But what a change

when we turn to this other peroration by Rajaji ('the Socrates of the Tamil country'), addressed to the Madras University Convocation in 1948:

I have told you enough about the sacred duties that now devolve on you. Daily an earnest prayer and honest effort will enable one to acquire two great qualities, a sense of responsibility and an affectionate temperament. These best adorn citizenship. If our youth acquires these virtues, India will be happy and great. External courtesies will help the growth of corresponding internal feelings. Restraint in behaviour and consideration for the feelings of others are what distinguish a man of culture. Be patient and kind always. Do not give way to jealousy or desire to boast. Be not rude. Do not always insist on having your own way. Do not allow yourself to be irritated or be resentful. Do not rejoice at wrong. Rejoice in the right. Try to bear misfortunes bravely. Show trust in others and have faith that love will prevail. This is what Paul said. This is what Gandhi said. May God bless you!

There is here no attempt at style at all. The short sentences come sharply one after another like a series of brush strokes, and the last three sentences linking up Paul, Gandhi and God build up a revelation and a benediction almost Upanishadic in their intensity. It must, of course, be admitted that if the old style of the pre-Gandhian era erred sometimes by affecting extravagance, bombast or pseudo-scholarship, the new style errs no less by descending often to the slipshod, the staccato and the puerile. To redress the balance, however, there is the colourful, poetical, polyphonic prose of Aurobindo and the Aurobindonians, with its global sweep in thought and expression. The net gain has accordingly been immense.

Even with almost exact contemporaries, while broadly sharing certain common features, 'style' must vary with the individuality of the speaker or writer. This may be illustrated by setting side by side the obituary tributes to Gandhi paid by Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and Rajaji, all of whom had long known and loved the Mahatma. Thus Nehru in the Constituent Assembly:

We praise people in well-chosen words and we have some kind of a measure for greatness. How shall we praise him and how shall we measure him, because he was not of the common clay that all of us are made of. . . . How can we praise him, we who have been

the children of his, and perhaps more intimately children of his than the children of his body, for we have all been in some greater or smaller measure the children of his spirit.

The glory has departed and the Sun that warmed and brightened our lives has set and we shiver in the cold and dark. Yet he would not have us feel this way. After all, the glory that we saw all these years, that man with the divine fire, changed us also, and such as we are, we have been moulded by him during these years, and out of that divine fire many of us also took a small spark which strengthened us, made us work to some extent on the lines that he fashioned. And so, if we praise him, our words seem rather small; and if we praise him, to some extent we praise ourselves ...

These are words of anguish, words that purify and exalt, words that reveal at once the bereaved orphan, the responsible statesman, and the literary artist. Mrs. Naidu's broadcast, especially the peroration, is pitched on a somewhat different key:

Some of us are indeed dead, with him. Some of us, indeed, have had vivisection performed on us by his death, because the fibres of our being, our muscles, veins and hearts and blood were all intertwined with his life ...

May the soul of my Master, my Leader, my Father, rest not in peace, not in peace. My Father, do not rest. Do not rest. Keep us to our pledge. Give us the strength to fulfil our promise, your heirs, your descendants, your students, guardians of your dreams, fulfilers of India's destiny.

Our "fibres ... muscles ... veins ... hearts ... blood" were "intertwined with his life"! Is the imagery too audacious? But Nehru too had said much the same thing: "this man of divine fire managed in his life-time to become enmeshed with millions and millions of hearts so that all of us became somewhat of the stuff that he was made of". Our hearts were intertwined with his life, says Mrs. Naidu; his life was enmeshed with our hearts, says Nehru. Love and anguish make them say almost the same thing, and in almost the same way.

Ten days later, when the last rites had been performed, Rajaji spoke from Calcutta:

Even now our grief tends to find solace and shape in anger and violence. Eternal must be our vigilance against this original sin which poisons our natures. Suppression and State coercion cannot be

avoided in this imperfect world. But let us clearly and once for all realize that ill-will cannot be overcome except in the way our beloved leader taught. There is much warlike talk about peace and much belligerent demand for goodwill. But fire cannot be quenched by pouring oil on it. . . . Do not demand love. Love is never obtained that way. Begin to love and you will be loved. Increase your love and more love will be induced and will flow towards you. This is the law and no statute or logic can alter this.

There is in Nehru's speech the all-sufficing simplicity and sensitiveness of the humanist; in Sarojini Naidu's, there is the force of the tidal wave that is the poet's frenzy of imagination; and there is in Rajaji's exhortation the urgency and ethical earnestness of the man of steady wisdom whose present anguish is matched by his anxious concern for the future.

The Gandhian impact on contemporary Indian literature has brought about results at various levels, and in various directions. As regards the writer's choice of language, we have seen that one result of the Gandhian influence has been a general preference for the mother tongue or the regional language, and occasionally a purposeful bilingualism, the same writer handling with mastery his own mother tongue as well as English. Besides, whatever the language medium chosen, the stress has been more on simplicity and clarity and immediate effectiveness than on ornateness or profundity or laborious artistry, and this has been as marked in English writing as in writing in the regional languages. As regards the choice of themes and the portrayal of character, the Gandhian influence has been no less marked. There has been a more or less conscious shift of emphasis from the city to the village, or there is implied a contrast between the two—urban luxury and sophistication on the one hand and rural modes and manners on the other. Shanker Ram has written movingly about the 'Children of the Kaveri' in the Tamil country, and Humayun Kabir has vividly pictured, in his novel *Men and Rivers*, the life of the children of the Padma in Bengal. In *Love of Dust*, again, Shanker Ram shows how, for a villager like Venkatachalam, his land is not just a piece of property, a negotiable instrument almost, but rather a part of himself nurtured by his toil, tears and sweat, and the sharer of his hopes and the cause of his anxieties. Shanker Ram's Velan and Valli

are also recognizable rural types—an unspoiled rural Romeo and his Juliet—capable of suffering and sacrifice and stem above. The other side of rural life is not ignored; the lights and shades are mingled as in actual life, but the essential simplicity, beauty and even nobility of the rural way of life are brought out with disarming sincerity and power. In recent years, Shanker Rane has enriched Tamil with a series of novels and short stories characterized by the same power of observation and psychological penetration that are so strikingly evident in his English writing.

There is, then, K. S. Venkataramani, whose *Murugan the Tiller* and *Kandian the Farmer* could only have been written after the occurrence of Gandhi on the Indian horizon. Murugan is an exponent of Gandhian economics; as Kandian is an exponent of Gandhian politics; and Venkataramani's other writings, most notably *Tanadharan*, a collection of stories, and *The Next Thing*, a critique of modern civilization from a more forthright Gandhian point of view—bear ample witness to the Mahatma's influence. Already well known as the author of *Papers Boat*, a collection of sensitive rural sketches, and *On the Sand Dunes*, a philosophical sauserie in rhythmical prose, it was nevertheless this *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) that stabilized Venkataramani's reputation. The book is laden with golden phrases, whole sentences rich in their gorgeous embroidery, witty sallies that tickle but do not wound, and even passages of sheer poetry. The scene shifts from village to town and back from town (or city) to village, till at last one has the feeling that all roads lead to Murugan and his rural experiment. The river scenes at the village, Alavanti, seem to punctuate the progress of the action like the choruses in a Greek tragedy. The principal characters seem to be persons and symbols both; and many a Mylapore lawyer of yesterday might well have muttered in an agony of self-discovery: "Kedari is ME!—and, indeed, the species is found all over India, and not in Mylapore alone, nor in the legal profession alone. Education, professional standing and status, social graces and connections, are all mobilized towards one end—SUCCESS—success anyhow, success somehow. One must advance further and further, leaving Daridra Narayana far behind, and in the struggle for achieving material success (d)

mirage at best), no quarter can be given to anybody or anything whatsoever. What is fine may have to be sacrificed, and what is coarse may have to be received with open arms. The end is supposed to justify the means, and where the end is of dubious propriety, the means have to be more dubious and improper still. This so-called struggle for success is necessarily a corrupting and a rotting process. Only failure—a total crash—can bring about an awakening from the nightmare death-in-life that is material success which is divorced from the basic human and spiritual values. When such a crash overtakes Kedari, he accepts the less spectacular but more sane and humane ideals of Ramu, his college friend, and all find in the honest tiller of the soil a purity and self-sufficiency of motive and action that the splendours of our material heavens totally lack. It is evident that Venkataramani has put something of himself into both Kedari and Ramu, who are really the reverse and obverse of the same medal. Ramu is the visioned future, but Kedari is the diseased present. Success like Kedari's is a consuming flame which nurses only a darkness at the centre, but Ramu's career of seeming frustration is the cold flint that treasures life-giving heat and light. One could, of course, expatiate at length on *Murugan* as a tract for the times; yet, even as a novel, it is breathlessly interesting and leaves an unforgettable impression on the reader's mind.

It was during 1931-32, when I happened to be in Madras and was lucky enough to cultivate Venkataramani's friendship, that his second novel, *Kandan the Patriot*, appeared serially in the *Swarajya*, then a daily paper edited by the Andhra patriot, T. Prakasam. The second Round Table Conference at London (which Gandhi attended as the 'sole representative' of the Indian National Congress) proving abortive, the year 1932 witnessed a renewal of the Civil Disobedience movement. Repression ran amuck all over the country, and not least in Madras; Khasa Subba Rau (in his last years the editor of the resurrected *Swarajya*) was among the many victims of police excesses, and we who knew that *Kandan the Patriot* was shortly to be published in book form were half-afraid that it might be banned. In the meantime, Ramakotiswara Rao (editor of *Triveni*) played the midwife (as Venkataramani himself put it more than once)

and expertly handled the proofs. The book came out at last, and I read it through in a fever of nervous exultation and composed my review the same night and had the satisfaction that mine was the first review of the book to appear. What if my M.A. examination lay ahead, an undefined spectre? What if *Beowulf* remained unread, and the mysteries of linguistics remained unexplored? What mattered was that *Kandan the Patriot* was out of the press, it was not banned, it was enthusiastically received,—and it even sold well! *Kandan* gained in importance because it was the very image of the excruciating times we were then passing through; and Kandan was close enough to Venkataramani and Gandhi, as also to Ramu, that his portrait acquired a connotative richness which even he who ran couldn't miss. The glory of Kandan is that he achieves what seemed impossible in the earlier novel—he combines Kedari's intellectual brilliance and Ramu's steady idealism. Although he has gained entry through sheer merit into the I.C.S., he decides to give it up. This is no freak of a novelist's fancy, for there have, after all, been instances of a Sri Aurobindo, a Subhas Chandra Bose, an H. V. Kamath not finally succumbing to the lure of the 'heaven-born' service and going rather to the other extreme—fighting the bureaucracy, instead of merging in it and sustaining it. If all roads ultimately lead in *Murugan* to the tiller's way of life in rural surroundings, in *Kandan* all roads lead at last to Satyagraha, to a defiance of the 'satanic' government through the power of suffering and love. Although Kandan is a moral force of vast dimensions, Venkataramani doesn't allow him to dominate the action to the exclusion of the other dramatis personae. It is a mass movement for liberation that is projected in the novel, and hence the weight and amplitude of the mass is not less important than the force and velocity of the spearhead, for without the conjunction of mass and velocity there can be no commensurate momentum for the movement. Leadership is called for at various levels, and a hundred—a thousand—wills have to coalesce to accomplish the cumulative effect of a mass defiance of authority in non-violent terms. But politics is not the whole life even of a subject nation; and since *Kandan* is described by the author as 'a Novel of New India in the Making', he has wisely allowed other emotions than politics

also its have their play. Personal and domestic problems mix and fuse with the larger political problem, and in the result a fascinating pattern of motive and character and action emerges in the novel. Thus the petty stationmaster and his charming wife are important too in the scheme of the novel; Rajeswari Bai has a veritable Rami of Thiansi touch of fiery idealism; the dream schoolboy, the rich landlord, the drunkards that are prototypical of the tribe, are all presented with understanding and sympathy. The railway collision in the earlier part of the novel is one focus of the action, the later charge on the Satyagrahis in the latter part of the novel is another focus, and the world of *Kandala the Patriot* revolves round, and is held together by, these two foci. The novel thus scores both on account of the adroitness of the plotting and the variegated brilliance of the characterization. Humour and poetry and politics and prophecy mingle together in bewildering fashion, but anyhow the result is a novel of permanent and paramount significance. In his last years, Venkataramani suffered ill-health and even neglect, and people asked why he was not writing any more *Murugan* and *Kandala*. But, then, books like *Murugan* and *Kandala* are written out of one's heart's blood, and cannot be written to order; they are more than novels, and are really a poet's and a Vedantist's testament that bridges our traditional living past and the modern dynamic present and shows the way to a rich ambrosial future.

Although Venkataramani's *Kandala the Patriot* is a picture—sharp and suggestive rather than complicated and comprehensive—of the Gandhian Age, fusing certain individual and the total national perspectives in terms of creative art, it achieves all this without actually introducing the Mahatma himself as a character. Kalmala Markandeya's *Some Inner Fury* achieves a similar feat with regard to a later phase of the Gandhian Age covered by the 'Quit India' movement of the early forties. R. K. Narayan, however, makes Gandhi himself a character in *Waiting for the Mahatma*; and so does Mulk Raj Anand in *Untouchable* and the later *The Sword and the Sickle*. Gandhi materially and directly affects the fortunes of Narayan's heroine, Bharati, and her lover, Srirani; and the novel ends with Gandhi's death at the hands of an assassin on the way to prayer. In *Untouchable*, Bakha hears

Gandhi making a speech, but has no personal contact with him. In *The Sword and the Sickle*, on the contrary, the hero Lala Singh, a revolutionary, has an interview with Gandhi, which is given a central place in the action. Returning to Lahore after the first World War from a German prison camp, Lala Singh learns about the Kilafat wrongs and General Dyer's brutalities at Amritsar, about the people's patient suffering and Gandhi Mahatma's inspiring words. Back in his village, he learns that his mother is no more and that his family property is gone. What had Lala Singh and his like been fighting for? To make the rich sahibs richer and enjoy the giddy pleasures of life? 'Down with Sarkar! Mahatma Gandhi-ki Jai' are the battle-cries that now ring in his ears. He feels that his dead mother, his broken home and his forfeited land are wrongs to be avenged. Maya, the girl he had loved before enlisting, is now a widow, and comes back to him, and they escape to live a life of their own. But Lala cannot be content with love and hence he joins the revolutionary party with a view to converting the prison that was India into 'a free land like Russia (Russia), where there are no divisions of religion or property among people . . .' Meeting with difficulties of all kinds, he approaches Gandhi for help, and the interview takes place at the Anand Bhavan, Allahabad.

Lalu joined hands to the Mahatma. There was something in the stern silence of the great man's attitude which demanded reverence. The Mahatma smiled at Lala, a kind of brief, casual nod which set him at rest in the dry, formal atmosphere of these upper regions. There was a sincerity in the great man's diction . . .

'The first thing I can say to the peasants', the Mahatma said, looking Lala straight in the face, as if admonishing him, 'is to cast out fear. The real relief is for them to be free from fear.' . . .

This impressed Lala. It was uncanny how the Mahatma had laid his finger on the first trait which was obvious in the peasant character, their terror-stricken abjectness . . .

'If the waging of a struggle to redress the grievances of the peasants is violence . . . then I have committed violence', Lala confessed . . .

'Not the airing of grievances of the ryots, but the invocation of revolution against the landlords, is violence', said the Mahatma.

When the peasant struggle is launched, Lala is arrested, and

the novel concludes with his first night in jail, and his doleful thoughts about his Maya and their child.

Not Mahatma Gandhi alone, but many of the leading personalities of the Gandhian Age also are introduced into Khrwaja Ahmad Abbas's *Inqilab* (1955). Although written during 1942-49, the novel actually covers the earlier period commencing from the Rowlatt Bill and the Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy to the Salt Satyagraha and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. Anwar the 'hero' is 8 at the beginning, a mere impressionable boy, and 21 when the novel closes, a sad and rather a seasoned young man. The novelist's ambitious intention is to project the Gandhian Revolutionary Age ('Inqilab' means Revolution) in its entirety, and Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, C. R. Das, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Ansari, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Maulana Azad, Dr. Sapru and Mr. M. R. Jayakar (the peace-makers), Syed Muhammad, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Pandit Malaviya are among the many leaders of yesterday (some of whom are happily with us still) whom we momentarily encounter in the pages of the novel. Planned like a typical 'character' novel, the aim is comprehension and moving multiplicity rather than dramatic concentration or intensity. Anwar is shifted from place to place, things happen to him, he registers impressions of a various nature, and he is involved—like a leaf in the storm—in the political cataclysms of his time. It is at Dr. Ansari's place that Anwar sees Gandhi first: "a thin, spindly-legged man in coarse *dhoti* and *kurta*, plying a *charkha*. He had a white cloth thrown over his head and from a distance Anwar had taken him to be a woman". The years of the Kilafat-Punjab agitation, the triple boycott and the mass jail-going are followed by the violence at Chauri Chaura and Hindu-Muslim disturbances at Delhi and elsewhere. Anwar, now a growing boy, has an emotional interview with Gandhi at Muhammad Ali's house:

Now he knew why they called him Mahatma—a Great Soul. On his face was a look of suffering, kindness and pity, as if he personally felt the misery of every single human being. But there was also infinite calm and serenity and the boy's spirits revived as he looked into those gentle eyes.

Anwar presently proceeds to the Muslim University at Aligarh, and promptly falls in love with the charming Salmah, his professor's daughter; but he also comes in contact with students of divers political hues—communalists, congressmen, communists, revolutionaries. He meets the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners, and receives the impact of Jawaharlal's exhortation: *Live Dangerously!* After the Lahore Congress of December 1929, Anwar takes the Independence Pledge in his university on 26 January 1930, and is expelled along with other student leaders. Since he will not give up politics, Salmah turns away to safety and security, and marries a Deputy Superintendent of Police. Anwar is now fully committed to political action, and strikes up an acquaintance with an American correspondent who sees a clear resemblance between Gandhi and Christ. During the 'struggle' in Bombay, Anwar gains the friendship of Asha and of the ailing Yeshwant, who completes his Gujarati translation of *Capital* and dies the next day. Anwar travels all over India in the company of his American friend, Robert, and sees men and things and the stir of events and the temper of the people. The novel closes, on the political plane, with the Gandhi-Irwin settlement; and, on the personal plane, with the explosive revelation that Anwar is really a Hindu merchant's illegitimate son, though brought up by a Muslim with more than a father's love. "The last twist of the knife"!

It cannot be said that politics is properly subsumed in *Inqilab*, that personal and political histories are artistically blended in its narrative. There is too much politics, and much of the writing is journalistic; the canvas is too large, the stage is too crowded; the attempt to comprehend too much has led to a kind of cramming of incidental detail, the multiplicity blurs the main outlines, the historical record scores at the expense of the human story. It is evident that the large-scale importation of politics and political figures into a novel cannot succeed unless the writer brings into play the sweep of comprehension, the architectonic power and sheer creative energy that have gone into the making of a masterpiece like *War and Peace*; and the difficulties must be all the greater when the present age (and not the events of a past age, as in Tolstoy's novel) is the theme of the fictional narrative. Only resolved limitation, reference to

actual political figures by implication rather than their introduction as regular actors in the drama, and greater stress on the eternal human and spiritual as distinct from the ephemeral political or economic values could make possible novels like *Kandari the Patriot*. Venu Chitale's *In Transit* (1950), like *Inqilab*, is a history of our own times, and it is also a family chronicle. It has a less crowded canvas, and it is less exciting as a narrative. Indian history between the two world wars was packed with change—social, political, economic, psychological. The era of Tilak imperceptibly gave place to the era of Gandhi. The task of combining in a single picture the personal and family perspectives as also the larger national horizons, and of maintaining the right balance between the weight of tradition and the momentum of change, calls for creative powers of a very high order, and hence it is no derogation of Venu Chitale's work to say that she has not succeeded—any more than Abbas has done—in making her long novel an epic of renescent India. But as a study of Hindu joint family life in Maharashtra, set in the background of the Gandhian Age, *In Transit* merits praise. A joint family is an intricate microcosm; there is tragedy in a smothered sob, and there is melodrama in vain attitudinizations. It must be readily conceded that Venu Chitale has caught the sob and has not missed the drama.

In *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961), K. Nagarajan has given a convincing picture of life in a South Indian district town during the nineteen thirties. Nagarajan's earlier novel, *Athawar House*, was a family chronicle after the manner of Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and ended with the adventurous, even revolutionary, inter-caste marriage of Sona, a Maratha Brahmin girl, to Venkatramani, a Tamil *smartha*. Sona and Venkatramani reappear in *Chronicles of Kedaram* towards the end, though only as mourfulers in London when they hear of the death of a fellow-Kedaramite, the advocate Chari. Not a family, the Athawar House, but the town Kedaram itself, is the theme of Nagarajan's new novel. A more ambitious undertaking than *Athawar House*, *Chronicles of Kedaram* snaps action at various levels: there is the clash between the Old and the New; there is the conflict between Britain and India, the bureaucracy and the people, the Congress and the Justice Party, the Hindu and the Muslim,

the brahmin and the non-brahmin, and even (and most prominently) that absurdity of absurdities, the chronic feud between the two Iyengar sects—the *tengalai* and the *vadakalai*! All strife is worse than crime; for all strife is folly. With a sure sense of the ridiculous, Nagarajan makes the Iyengar feud the immediate background of the drama. And it needs no less a power than Mahatma Gandhi to end the tension. In the classic short story, 'An Elephant's Creed in Court' by the South Indian humorist 'S. V. V.', the Iyengar feuds are nearly laughed out of court. Actually these feuds go back, at least to the eighteenth century. In 1754 the then Governor of Fort St. George recorded:

The Tangala Braminies maintain that Sarasayala was the Translator of the Widdam from the Sanscrit language, and therefore insist that he should be prayed for as such; and the Wadagal Bramineys contend that Ramarajuze was the true Translator. This Spark hath by a Zeal not uncommon in Ecclesiastical Disputes, been blown up into a Flame which is now become necessary to quench.

And somewhere or other, the *tengalai-vadakalai* feud flares up even today. In *Chronicles of Kedaram*, the fortunes of the rival Iyengar factions are linked up with the fortunes of their respective senior counsel, P. P. T. Chari and Vanchinatha Sastri, and also with the fortunes of the Congress. When Gandhi's intervention unites the two Iyengar factions, all the Iyengars plump for the Congress and thereby ensure its ultimate victory at the polls. It is all intrinsically funny, yet rings unquestionably true. Nagarajan is a good story-teller, a faithful Cethru, according to the lights of his chosen medium—Gokarna (Koni) Sastri. Like Conrad's Marlow, Nagarajan's Koni too determines the novelist's point of view. We see men and affairs, not as Nagarajan saw them, but as honest, pedestrian, conservative Koni—a Dr. Watson to his Holmes-Vasu—saw them. We see Gandhi too as Koni saw him, and Koni (or Nagarajan) is wise not to put a long speech into the Mahatma's mouth. Koni blandly says that he did not hear a word of what Gandhi said.

So far as I could see, nobody did. The din was terrific. Stray words floated on the air. India's right to govern herself, *swaraj*, *khaddar*, Vanchinatha Sastri, *harijans*, *devadasis*, and so on, so that one could guess what he was saying.

It is difficult to say whether Nagarajan is praising Gandhi or pulling somebody's legs. There are other ambivalent touches, too, and one feels that, on the whole, it would have been better had Nagarajan *not* introduced Gandhi overtly into the story. On the other hand, these backgrounds—political, racial, communal, social—and the vividly realized Kedaram with its temples, its *sthalapurana*, its enchanting environs, are all but a foil to the foreground drama concerning Vasu and Nirmala Chari. Nagarajan presents this love story with a mixture of naivety and subtlety, and while friends, relations, partisans, detractors, lawyers and judges speculate this or that way, the mystery remains, and beauty declines commerce with the earth. Nirmala is the real triumph of the novel. It is by the effect she produces on others that we see her—differently at different times. Hemadri sees her in his own image, and so does Vanchi; Koni, puzzled at all times, is now more puzzled than ever, though when he hears her sing and sees her face to face, he is quite overpowered, and compares her with Sakuntala and recalls the “delightful verse of Kalidasa . . . the one about the unsmelt flower and the fresh honey and the personification of all virtue”. Koni's wife, Alamelu, with her woman's intuition sees the truth in a flash: “Nirmala is as pure as *pushkarini* water . . . one of the sweetest girls I know.” Nirmala is in some respects like Irene in *The Man of Property*. It is appropriate that, having experienced failure in marriage and love, having lost both her parents, Nirmala should seek a sanctuary in the Mahatma's Ashram at Sabarmati. This decision of hers brings out the power of Gandhi's personality much better than his physical presence at Kedaram. Not one Nirmala, but scores of them, perhaps hundreds of them, have found in the Mahatma's love the solvent of their own private aches and viperous frustrations.

There are other novels, too,¹—though they are not as many as one might wish,—that have tried to catch some of the accents of the Gandhian Age: the idealism, the agony, the violence, the shocks of defeat, the fleeting spasms of victory. There is, for example, Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*, about the Bengal famine; Anand Lall's *The House at Adampur*, Lambert

¹ *Kanthapura*, probably the best of these novels, is discussed in the chapter on Raja Rao.

Mascarenhas's *Sorrowing Lies My Land* (about Goa's struggle for liberation), and Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy* are all interesting to read; there are, also, the plays *The Well of the People* and *Two Women* by Bharati Sarabhai, referred to already in an earlier talk; and, of course, there are numerous poems—long or short—inspired by Gandhi. Thus Sarojini Naidu:

O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,
 In myriad-petalled grace inviolate,
 Supreme o'er transient stores of tragic Fate,
 Deep-rooted in the waters of all Time,
 What legions loosed from many a far-off clime
 Of wildbee hordes with lips insatiate,
 And hungry winds with wings of hope or hate,
 Have thronged and pressed round thy miraculous prime
 To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
 The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart.
 But who could win thy secret, who attain
 Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma's breath,
 Or pluck thine immortality, who art
 Coeval with the Lords of Life and Death?

The sonnet is entitled 'The Lotus', and Gandhi is apostrophized as 'O mystic Lotus'; and the parallelism between the 'Lotus' and the 'Mahatma' is packed with significances and holds the sonnet taut and vibrant throughout. Even before Gandhi had returned to India for good from South Africa, Gokhale had commented on "the wonderful personality of the man" and added: "He is without doubt made of the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made". Like Gokhale, like Tagore in his poem *The Child*, Sarojini Naidu too seems to have had an unconscious premonition about the final martyrdom, the holocaust on the evening of 30 January 1948. Yet the 'wildbee hordes' from without and the 'hungry winds' within couldn't really touch the Mahatma, for he is "coeval with the Lords of Life and Death". Less veiled by symbolism, more direct in articulation, are these lines by Humayun Kabir:

A lone figure stands upon the sands of time ...
 Launches India's resistless caravan

into adventures new, a perilous path
 where out of life's substance must be carved
 new values, new direction, order new—
 Gandhi, mahatma, India's leader, India's soul.

Thus Cyril Modak in a volume (*Jawaharlal Nehru and Other Poems*) published in 1946:

From star-fringed galleries of heaven, lo! thrice
 Thrice happy, Freedom's martyrs shout the praise
 Of one who flaunts at death and Christlike pays
 His life-blood as his people's ransom price!

Did Modak actually *anticipate* the Mahatma's martyrdom? Modak is apt to speak out loud and bold, and he defiantly asks: "When life has been shorn of much of its grandeur and the rich are avaricious and the great are mean and two-thirds of humanity is kept from its rightful inheritance, how can poets use the grand style?" Another poet, H. D. Sethna, has tried to snap moments of national agony in pieces like 'Calvary':

O God! Sorrow pleads in vain
 The nation striving to be free,
 There's lit up in death and pain
 The ancient beauty of Calvary;

and 'The Dead Student':

The song of birds at dawn. But he still lay
 A corpse upon the street;
 He loved the people well,—'twas yesterday.
 In the moment's heat
 He heard his country's call and he obeyed.
 "He was too young!" they say,
 But of such love a nation shall be made
 On a fairer kindlier day.

Describing his credo, Sethna writes in the foreword to *Struggling Heights* (1944):

Our country's consciousness has contrasting forces,—its rebellious modern spirit on the one hand, and on the other, its assimilation of the original ancient inspiration. In a surging stream of contemporary

experiences, these forces express themselves. The poet catches a few experiences and crystallizes them through the imagination. But even as he does it, his attempt is always, as . . . Stephen Spender says, 'to imagine in terms of the transitory forms of the present in which a generation lives, the universal nature of a man's being'.

But this transformation of what is of the moment into the permanent and the timeless has seldom been achieved. An ambitious effort is R. R. Sreshta's long poem on the Mahatma's martyrdom, 'A Light unto our Path'. There are many striking lines and a few notable stanzas, but the total effect is rather disappointing. Two stanzas that recall the Buddha, Socrates and Jesus in the context of Gandhi's martyrdom may be quoted here:

Aye, long ago, still clear to pious sight,
In sacred Gaya was a glory spread,
And then in Athens walked a lord of light
Whose mellow wisdom was in hemlock sped,
And after came, lest meekest men repine,
The kindly light that shone in Palestine.

Most blessed we among the generations
Who saw a light with these our mortal eyes,
But wretched most among the many nations
To see that light extinguished in such wise.
Our day is turned to night, our night to woe,
Weep, orphaned children, let the sad tears flow.

There is, finally, a whole library of Gandhiana consisting of biographies, memoirs, critical studies, and discussions, apart from the immense mass of Gandhi's own writings and speeches. The eight-volume biography, *Mahatma* (1951-54), by D. G. Tendulkar is mainly useful as a source-book, while P. A. Wadia's *Mahatma Gandhi* (1939) is at the other end of the scale; an inquiry into the character and greatness of Gandhi in the form of a discussion between four persons. Pyarelal's *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase* (1954, '58) is another veritable mine of information, and we are enabled to watch and hear Gandhi day by day, almost hour by hour. Hiren Mukerjee's *Gandhiji* (1958) and E. M. S. Namboodripad's *The Mahatma and the 'Ism'* (1958) are vivid portraits with a Marxian slant. Among other studies are D. F. Karaka's *Out of Dust* (1942), J. M.

Kumarappa's *Economy of Permanence* (1948) and N. K. Bose's *My Days with Gandhi* (1953). There are also informative and authoritative books on Satyagraha like Acharya J. B. Kripalani's *The Gandhian Way* (1945), K. G. Mashruwala's *Practical Non-Violence* (1945) and R. R. Diwakar's *Satyagraha: Its Technique and History* (1946).

While Gandhi literature is already vast and is rapidly growing (there is even a regular quarterly journal, *Gandhi-Marg*), it must be admitted all the same that the impact of Gandhi at the deeper levels, provoking a transvaluation of current values, has not been effective enough to produce lasting results. Gandhi is often being cited more as a matter of form and convenience than of deep conviction. What is there in common between Gandhi and Gandhism on the one hand, and, on the other, the vogue for massive industrialization and prohibitive gigantism that are so striking a feature of the Age of Nehru, the Age of Planned Economy? Gandhi laid stress again and again on moral and spiritual values in contrast to material advancement, although this had its place too; he knew that too much industrialization must spell disaster to the seven lakhs of Indian villages; and he adopted the loin cloth and the Sevagram way of life because he felt that, for the teeming millions of India, no other life was possible—yet he knew that even such bare colourless life could be made reasonably full and purposive. The following exhortation by J. Vijayatunga, the talented Ceylonese writer now naturalized in India, puts the finger on the weak spot in all our present-day thinking and points an accusing finger at our forgetting the quintessential message of the Mahatma:

I do not think that Asia (or Africa) can solve its problems, Health, Nutritional, Economic, or Civil, by our tying ourselves to the chariot wheels of Progress as it is defined and understood in the West. Whether it is a question of sanitation or social organization, we in Asia would do better to tackle it in a localized, decentralized way as Mahatma Gandhi wanted. That way lies harmony and world peace and world health and sanity.

Although for the last 60 years at least Gandhi has been the subject of biographical and expository studies—J. J. Doke's *M. K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* appeared in

1909 and Romain Rolland's *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being* followed 15 years after—the approach of the Gandhi birth-centenary (2 October 1969) had understandably stimulated of late a greatly increased flow of Gandhian literature. *Mahatma Gandhi: 100 Years*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, was brought out by the Gandhi Peace Foundation in 1968, and contained numerous tributes by Gandhi's friends and admirers the world over. While several contributors—Rajaji, Richard B. Gregg, Swami Ranganadha-nanda, B. N. Rau, G. Ramachandran—have tried to stress one or another aspect of Gandhi's life and personality, many others have bemoaned the fact that Gandhism is hardly a live force in India today. It would have been better had we simply forgotten him; but the things that are now being done in his name, or by his professed followers! Mr. M. C. Chagla writes:

The most dishonest, the most disreputable and the most corrupt politicians capitalize on his name, and everyday he is being assassinated again, not in the body, but in the spirit.

Jagjivan Ram writes:

Today casteism has permeated political life to such an extent that the very structure of our democracy is threatened. Nobody appears to take note of this cancer. Tension is mounting and yet the atmosphere of drift continues. The levers of caste are manipulated by all striving for political power, not in the furtherance of an integrated nationalism, but for sectarian ends which weaken the composite fabric.

Pyarelal points out that, in 1964-65, the country exported bone of dead cattle for Rs. 3 crores and imported chemical fertilisers for Rs. 50 crores (resulting in an adverse balance of Rs. 47 crores), and recalls Gandhi's constructive approach to the problem:

One of the last acts of Gandhiji was to get an all-India Compost Conference held at Delhi. As a result of its deliberations, a Compost Wing was set up at Delhi under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. It is never heard of, if it at all exists ...

But the total impression left by the book is that, although everything advocated by Gandhi may not be practicable today (for

example, even Mira Behn thinks that, after 50 years of undreamt of scientific and technological development, the spinning wheel cannot be expected to achieve today the results that were possible in the nineteen-twenties), there is certainly need to inject Gandhian idealism and singleness of purpose into our national affairs. "More than foreign aid", says Gunnar Myrdal, what India needs today is "a spiritual leader of Gandhi's greatness, his love, and fearlessness. Together with the group of patriots who would surround such a leader, he might electrify the nation to undertake, late but perhaps not too late, the revolutionary changes in social, economic and political institutions, attitudes and practices which are now desperately needed". Coming from the author of *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, the words cannot be dismissed either as casual criticism or as wishful thinking.

The Publications Division of the Government of India has been issuing the collected speeches and writings of Gandhi in instalments, and we seem to have reached already the year 1929; and when completed in about 50 volumes, this would be the absolutely indispensable source-book for all studies on the life and times of Gandhi. Writing and speaking as he did almost incessantly to varieties of individuals and groups and assemblies on an infinite variety of subjects, it is truly astonishing that Gandhi should still sound so fresh and genuine on almost every page. One is constantly taken aback by the range of Gandhi's interests, reading and speculation, one is overwhelmed again and again by the Mahatma's humility and humanity and unfailing fund of humour. Many learned tomes were published during the centenary year, and many pretentious books were formally released by some self-important functionary or other. The danger is that, under the accumulated weight of this heavy (Government-aided) programming and publicity, the spirit may go into hiding, if not disappear altogether; and even the simple humanity of the man may be forgotten in our preoccupation with the ism, the cult, the dogmas, and the rituals. But the authentic WORD—albeit spread over some fifty volumes—is our guarantee that the Truth about Gandhi the Man and his message of hope for humanity will not have passed from India and the world.

Jawaharlal Nehru

The history of Jawaharlal Nehru's writings and speeches merges with his life, and his life likewise merges with the life of the nation—the history of India—during the last forty years. You may approach his *Glimpses of World History* and *The Discovery of India*, his *Autobiography* and his *Speeches*; merely as a literary student, but you cannot long escape the fascination of the personality of the writer and speaker, nor the force of the currents of the recent Gandhian Age in our national history. A study of Nehru the writer thus becomes by necessary implication a study also of the man, and of modern India awakening from the stupor of the centuries and taking the first firm steps in the direction of the future. Thus, for anything like a proper assessment of Nehru, one needs critical insight as well as historical training, and even a correct sense of economic and political values. Above all, one has to understand the man, before one can evaluate the writer.

Jawaharlal's father, Motilal Nehru—Motilal the Magnificent, as he might have been called—was more an antique Roman than an Oriental, and his best speeches always bore the impress of a master-mind. Unquestionably the leading lawyer in his own province of what is now known as Uttar Pradesh, the call of the country made a new man of him at the age of sixty. The 'Punjab Tragedy' stirred him to the depths, and in the course of his great presidential address before the Amritsar Congress (1919) he painted a lurid picture of the 'author' of the tragedy, General Dyer—

The shooting in the Jallianwala Bagh was not the only feat which General Dyer performed. His subsequent conduct was no less revealing of his perverted state of mind. He tells us that 'he searched his brain' for a new punishment, a new terror for the people—something, as General Hudson put it in the Imperial Council, to 'strike

the imagination'. And the punishment that was devised did credit to General Dyer's ingenuity and ferocity. It was worthy of the days of the Inquisition. All Indians who happened to pass through a certain lane were forced to crawl on their bellies like worms. This was the punishment that was meted out to all innocent and peaceful men who went that way because some hooligans had attacked Miss Sherwood in the lane some days before. No better method could have been devised to humble the people to the dust.

As Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, he made many notable speeches, and several of his interventions while a debate was in progress—the debate, for example, on the Public Safety Bill—were dialectically brilliant, and his phrasing suddenly glowed and flashed forth pestilential fires:

... Sir Denys Bray talked about revolution. Now, sir, however much you may roll your 'r' in pronouncing the word 'revolution', it has no more than its dictionary meaning, and professedly we are all peaceful revolutionaries. . . . We want a revolution . . .

... what is now left to us is a mere hypocritical camouflage which conceals the real intention and does not touch even the fringe of the evil. If a name has to be given to the Bill, I am disposed to call it 'The Slavery of India Bill, No. 1', because I expect another to follow . . .

Sir, I mean no offence when I say that platitudinous pomposity is not argument, much less is it good administration. The best description that can be given of the principle that is involved in this Bill was given somewhere—I read it a few days ago—that it was a piece of arbitrary absolutism. I think that is a very apt description.

Speaking on a Resolution on the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance, Motilal neatly turned a point made earlier by the Governor-General against the Government itself:

We were told by His Excellency and rightly told that no political party can continue to live with terror for a friend. Now, sir, there is no doubt that terrorist organizations exist in the country but the greatest and the most powerful of these organizations is the Government of India and their terrorist agencies in the provinces. It was very rightly observed by His Excellency that the parasite kills the host. I say, sir, that the observation applies to terrorism both of political parties and of the Government and the parasite will kill the host in either case. Neither can continue to have terror for a friend.

On another occasion, Motilal firmly repudiated the insinuation that his party were a body of office-seekers and concluded with the peroration:

Our ambition, our highest ambition, sir, is . . . to be buried in the foundations of a free India, and then sink into obscurity, to be thought of no more. Who can thwart that ambition, I ask? Can all the mechanised forces of the Empire thwart it? No, sir, the ambition to work for the independence of one's country and to die for it cannot be thwarted by any human agency. We shall work on the foundations; I know we have not gone beyond the foundations; we shall continue to work on those foundations until we drop down dead and be buried in them. But I can assure you that we shall drop down dead in the supreme satisfaction that the noble edifice of the freedom of India shall in the fullness of time rise on our bones.

His presidential address before the Calcutta Congress of 1928, on the other hand, was a noble and mighty piece of pleading, meant to reconcile two rival groups within the Congress, one led by Gandhiji and himself, and the other by the late S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal. Whereas the Madras Congress (1927) had declared for complete Independence, the so-called All-Parties' Constitution (otherwise known as the Nehru-Sapru Report) had 'accepted' Dominion Status. At Calcutta, Motilal had both to mollify the Congress Extremists and warn the British diehards, and this he did with consummate tact:

I am for complete independence—as complete as it can be—but I am not against full dominion status as full as any dominion possesses it today—provided I get it before it loses all attraction. I am for severance of British connection as it subsists with us today but am not against it as it exists with the Dominions.

Reminiscing about his father, Jawaharlal said recently—

I remember, after his death, among the many tributes paid to him, the Chief Justice of a High Court, an Englishman, said about him that wherever he sat at a table, became the head of the table. . . . Or you might say, whenever he went to a gathering he became, in a sense, the centre of that gathering. He was a link, a bridge, or call it what you like, between different phases of history and social development. He combined in himself very much the mixed culture

of Northern India affected by the new culture of the West. . . . He was a great fighter and especially a fighter when there were odds against him.

Motilal Nehru gave his only son the best education that money could buy—Harrow, Cambridge—and wise parental stewardship did the rest. Returning to Allahabad after undergoing the exacting disciplines of Natural Science and Law, Jawaharlal was quickly drawn into the vortex of Indian politics. The Home Rule agitation first, under Annie Besant's leadership; and, presently, the ushering in of the Gandhian era of non-cooperation, satyagraha and civil disobedience—an era of fearless defiance of authority, jail-going on a mass scale, and revolutionary change in many fields of activity. Two men more unlike than Gandhi and Motilal could not be imagined, yet they now came together on the same political platform. Commenting on this, Jawaharlal writes in his *Autobiography*—

Walter Pater, in one of his books, mentions how the saint and the epicure, starting from opposite points, travelling different paths, one with a religious temper, the other opposed to it, and yet both with an outlook which, in its stress and earnestness, is very unlike any lower development of temper, often understand each other better than either would understand the mere man of the world—and sometimes they actually touch.

And Jawaharlal has also acknowledged that these two, the saintly leader and the epicurean father, as also the poet, Gurudev Tagore, have exerted the greatest influence in his life. Marx and Lenin, too, came into his life, and Jawaharlal's eyes turned longingly towards Moscow. Thus "post-War Moscow" collided with "pre-War Harrow", and in the middle twenties Jawaharlal emerged as a national leader of infinite possibilities and striking qualities.

A patriot's life in a subject nation is a hazardous affair, but there are compensations too. When Sri Aurobindo was lodged in the Alipur Jail, he had 'Narayana Darshan'; when Lokamanya Tilak was deported to Mandalay, he wrote his celebrated *Gita Rahasya*; Maulana Azad wrote his classic commentary on the *Koran* in rather like circumstances; and Jawaharlal too, as a cure for the creeping paralysis of isolation in jail, wrote a series

of letters to his daughter Indira when she was a child of ten, giving in simple language a brief account of "the early days of the world". As his relapses into prison life became chronic under the peculiar conditions of British rule in India, the letters too continued; and as Indira grew from a child to a girl, the letters also began to acquire a wider sweep and a deeper meaning. In *Letters from a Father to a Daughter* and *Glimpses of World History* are gathered together all this epistolary harvest of Jawaharlal's early prison years. An unpremeditated legacy from the British? Yes,—and why not?

There's a divinity shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will.

"I do not claim to be a historian", writes Jawaharlal disarmingly at the very outset, and adds, more disarmingly still: "Indeed, of the faults that these letters contain there is no end". Yet it has been affirmed that the *Glimpses* is "better history and better English" for a modern reader than Gibbon or Macaulay. A father talking to a daughter but not unaware of the physical separation between them—

Meanwhile, you sit in Anand Bhavan, and Mummie sits in Malacca Gaol, and I here in Naini Prison—and we miss each other sometimes, rather badly, do we not? But think of the day when we shall all three meet again!

a patriot shut off from the world but very keenly conscious of the oppressive burden of humanity's ills—

There is no peace for us in this turbulent twentieth century. . . . The whole world is in labour, and the shadow of war and revolution lies heavy everywhere. If we cannot escape from this inevitable destiny of ours, how shall we face it? Ostrich-like, shall we hide our heads from it? Or shall we play a brave part in the shaping of events and, facing risks and perils if need be, have the joy of great and noble adventure, and the feeling that our 'steps are merging with those of history'?

conscious of the present misery but not giving way to defeatism, cynicism or despair—or rather, plucking from despair itself the

seeds of future hope, seeing in the ashes of human failure only the Phoenix who holds the promise of future advance: such is Jawaharlal the author of the *Glimpses*. Not a "literary man", not a professional historian, yet this "mountain of letters" is without question the creation of an unconscious artist in words, and of a historian who is also in some considerable measure a maker of history. As one turns page after page of these letters, one is astonished by the breadth and catholicity of Jawaharlal's reading and sympathies, his easy charming prose, his candour, his humanity. Unsystematic history, this, and hence Greece suddenly touches India, and the past poignantly evokes the present—

Wonderful is the courage that conquers death! Leonidas and Thermopylae live for evermore, and even we in distant lands feel a thrill when we think of them. What, then, shall we say or feel of our own people, our own forbears, men and women of Hindustan, who right through our long history have smiled and mocked at death, who have preferred death to dishonour and slavery, and who have preferred to break rather than bow down to tyranny? Think of Chittor and its peerless story, of the amazing heroism of its Rajput men and women! Think also of our present day, of our comrades, warm-blooded like us, who have not flinched at death for India's freedom.

And when it comes to making broad generalizations, seizing and sorting out the essentials, or contrasting, say, traditional and revolutionary politics, how excellently does he do it, placing the right stress and finding the right words—

The politics of princes and statesmen have their home in the closet and the private room, and an air of mystery covers them. A discreet veil covers many sins, and decorous language conceals the conflict of rival ambitions and greed. Even when this conflict leads to war and vast numbers of young people are sent to their death for the sake of this greed and ambition, our ears are not offended by mention of any such lowly motives. We are told, instead, of noble ideals and great causes which demand the last sacrifice.

But a revolution is very different. It has its home in the field and the street and the market-place, and its methods are rough and coarse. The people who make it have not had the advantage of the education of the princes and the statesmen. Their language is not courtly and decorous, holding a multitude of intrigues and evil de-

signs. There is no mystery about them, no veils to hide the workings of their minds; even their bodies have little enough covering. Politics in a revolution cease to be the sport of kings or professional politicians. They deal with realities, and behind them are raw human nature and the empty stomachs of the hungry.

In historical portraiture too—neither elaborate nor over-subtle with side-tracking psychological chatter—Jawaharlal manages with a few touches to call to life the great figures of the past. The Buddha's story is told in a few lines, but nothing that is really relevant is omitted. Akbar receives due praise, but that he was, after all, an autocrat is readily admitted. Napoleon's dominant qualities naturally attract Jawaharlal, but the evil that his career generated is not glossed over. The assessments may not be altogether unexceptionable in every instance, but there is no doubt Jawaharlal has tried to be fair-minded and just, and has succeeded in large measure in this truly difficult task of 'judging' men and affairs.

In his critical essay on the *Glimpses*, Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah effectively compares Jawaharlal with some other famous historians—notably Louis Blanc whom he resembles, and Herder, Spengler, and Toynbee who are too philosophical or schematic and who are not unwilling to bend facts to suit theory. Narasimhaiah is particularly convincing when he boldly weighs in his critical balance Jawaharlal and Wells, and finds the latter pitifully wanting. By the side of Jawaharlal and his urbanity and insinuating humanity, with what heavy tread Wells sets about his job! Yet Wells wrote classics like *Kipps* and *Tono Bungay*, and even his *Histories*, because of their massiveness and impressive ordering of detail, were best-sellers. But Jawaharlal was not out to prove a thesis, he was not exactly bursting with a message, he was not fabricating a pocket encyclopaedia. Owing to the circumstances of its production, the *Glimpses* is almost a discontinuous and unequal narrative. Parts are dull, and parts are no more than rehashes of existing material; and there are repetitions, and there are conventional generalizations. Yet it is this very casualness and inequality,—this tone of intimacy, this acknowledged fallibility, this avoidance of dogmatism, this general reluctance to draw quick inferences,—that is the principal merit of the book. But then, when some-

thing has to be explained, how adequate is Jawaharlal's expression, as, for example, when he comments on *Satyagraha* as a means of political action—

Satyagraha was a definite, though non-violent, form of resistance to what was considered wrong. It was, in effect, a peaceful rebellion, a most civilized form of warfare, and yet dangerous to the stability of the State. It was an effective way of getting the masses to function, and it seemed to fit in with the peculiar genius of the Indian people. It put us on our best behaviour and seemed to put the adversary in the wrong. It made us shed the fear that crushed us, and we began to look people in the face as we had never done before, and to speak out our minds fully and frankly. A great weight seemed to be lifted from our minds, and this new freedom of speech and action filled us with confidence and strength. And, finally, the method of peace prevented to a large extent the growth of those terribly bitter racial and national hatreds which had always so far accompanied such struggles, and thus made the ultimate settlement easier.

And so he writes, explaining, recapitulating, anticipating—regrets mingling with hopes, darkness shading off into the coming dawn. Time past has flowed into Time present: something is dead, but something surely remains still; and out of this mixture of the past and the present we shall build the future. Scholars and savants might not at once understand this ambrosial truth, but boys and girls (and the *Glimpses* is primarily addressed to them) could understand it all right.

The 196 letters comprising the *Glimpses* were written between October 1930 and August 1933—about 1000 packed pages in rather less than three years. The *Autobiography* was, however, written in a continuous spell of about 9 months (June 1934 to February 1935)—it must have been an astonishing spate, almost a frenzy of writing. In the Preface he writes—

The primary object in writing these pages was to occupy myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes of gaol life, as well as to review past events in India, with which I have been connected, to enable myself to think clearly about them. I began the task in a mood of self-questioning and, to a large extent, this persisted throughout.

His wife's death after a painful illness prostrated him for a while, but he soon rallied and the *Autobiography* was published

in 1936, with a dedication to his wife "Kamala, who is no more". When the *Autobiography* appeared, Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* was already acknowledged as a world classic, and Jawaharlal's necessarily invited comparison with Gandhi's autobiography. Could it be different and still be a masterpiece—could the Testament of Youth be complementary to the Gandhian Testament—could it serve, shall we say, as sugar to that milk? Such, indeed, the *Autobiography* was seen to be, and the approbation was almost universal. People no doubt rightly resented Jawaharlal's ungenerous references to the late V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, and deplored the tone of intolerance that was heard here and there. But how overwhelmingly satisfying the total impression! It was a very personal book, being a sensitive individual's autobiography; on the contrary, it also struck one as the testament of a whole generation,—the generation that was striving hard to negotiate the difficult passage from the dying old world to the new world that was struggling to be born. The impact of men and events, the subtle influence of places, the fascination of Nature, the force of the current of history—all were recorded in nervous prose marked by a purity that is not often seen in these days of haste and slothfulness. Personal history was fused with national history, and we were privileged to watch the evolution of Jawaharlal's personality in the context of the drama of the national struggle, great actors playing their preordained part, and long suffering Bharat in the throes of a Revolution that had begun but not ended. It was a razor's edge that Jawaharlal trod upon: to expose one's innermost feelings, to uncover one's wounds as it were to the public; to judge one's contemporaries, to measure a Mahatma, to assess one's own father, to feel the pulse of one's love to one's mother—it was fatally easy to stumble, to slip, to fall: but he maintained a delicate balance, and neither faltered nor fell. He said in the Postscript:

To me these years have brought one rich gift, among many others. More and more I have looked upon life as an adventure of absorbing interest, where there is so much to learn, so much to do. I have continually had a feeling of growing up, and that feeling is still with me and gives a zest to my activities as well as to the reading of books, and generally makes life worth while.

It is this zest for life and sense of adventure, this steady glow and feeling of continual growth, that Jawaharlal has communicated to his narrative. One of the most moving and also revealing chapters in the book is the description of his first experience of lathi charges. It was in 1927, the year of the Simon Commission. With his companions Jawaharlal was peacefully demonstrating, and the lathi charge came. Was he to take the line of least resistance, or stand at his post of duty? He wavered a little, but stood his ground—

My own instinct had urged me to seek safety when I saw the horses charging down upon us; it was a discouraging sight. But then, I suppose, some other instinct held me to my place and I survived the first charge, which had been checked by the volunteers behind me. Suddenly I found myself alone in the middle of the road; a few yards away from me, in various directions, were the policemen beating down our volunteers. Automatically, I began moving slowly to the side of the road to be less conspicuous, but again I stopped and had a little argument with myself, and decided that it would be unbecoming for me to move away. All this was a matter of few seconds only, but I have the clearest recollections of that conflict within me and the decision, prompted by my pride, I suppose, which could not tolerate the idea of my behaving like a coward. Yet the line between cowardice and courage was a thin one, and I might well have been on the other side. Hardly had I so decided, when I looked round to find that a mounted policeman was trotting up to me, brandishing his long new baton. I told him to go ahead, and turned my head away—again an instinctive effort to save the head and face. He gave me two resounding blows on the back. I felt stunned, and my body quivered all over but, to my surprise and satisfaction, I found that I was still standing ...

Next day there was another lathi charge, and Jawaharlal was again in the thick of it—

And then began a beating of us, and battering with *lathis* and long batons both by the mounted and the foot police. It was a tremendous hammering, and the clearness of the vision that I had had the evening before left me. All I knew was that I had to stay where I was, and must not yield or go back. I felt half blinded with the blows, and sometimes a dull anger seized me and a desire to hit out ... but long training and discipline held and I did not raise a hand, except to protect my face from a blow. Besides, I knew well enough that any aggression on our part would result in a ghastly tragedy, the firing and shooting down of large numbers of our men.

Jawaharlal then describes the European sergeants and the look of hatred that distorted their faces, but acknowledges at the same time that the faces of the volunteers too could not have been beautiful or lighted with love. Jawaharlal can rise above the action, and nobly transcend mere sentimentality and pique. He has even a defence for the sergeants, for, after all, volunteers and sergeants were alike fellow human beings, and hence came within the range of his compassionate understanding—

And yet, we had no grievance against each other; no quarrel that was personal, no ill-will. We happened to represent, for the time being, strange and powerful forces which held us in thrall and cast us hither and thither, and, subtly gripping our minds and hearts, roused our desires and passions and made us their blind tools. Blindly we struggled, not knowing what we struggled for and whither we went. The excitement of action held us...

We're purblind men and women often jerked into action by blind forces that we can neither understand nor control! The nation's unfolding history—the complex of antagonistic forces called suddenly into play—blind armies warring at night—and Jawaharlal inextricably involved in the tangle and the fray: isn't this the main theme of the *Autobiography*? Yet Jawaharlal the rationalist and humanist tries to stand aside and scrutinize it all with detachment, probe into the motives and purposes, watch the movements and directions, and take such pointer readings or make such appropriate jottings as the occasions call for. Jawaharlal is really discovering himself, and trying to discover his bearings in the muddled ocean of Indian politics.

With the publication of the *Autobiography* ended the first phase of Jawaharlal's quest for certainty. He was one of the 'senior' leaders now, not just the most well-known among the 'junior' leaders. Motilal and Kamala were no more, and Indira was growing up; and Jawaharlal threw himself into work once again. He became the bridge between the formidable Old Guard and the talkative young men (the Socialists, the Royists, and the men of the Forward Bloc)—but it seemed to be more a Bridge of Sighs than a Bridge of Realization or even Reconciliation. It was never quite clear which way the Gandhian breeze would blow, and everyone—including Jawaharlal—

knew that without the Mahatma, there was no doing anything whatsoever. As he once wrote to Subhas Bose, "challenging Gandhi and his group" was not to be thought of, for it would be "injurious to the interests of India and our cause". Some of Jawaharlal's hesitations, heart-searchings, and explorations into the jungle of Indian and European politics were rendered in speech and newspaper article from time to time, and these were collected into *Unity of India* by V. K. Krishna Menon. There is abundant evidence in this volume to justify Jawaharlal being called the Hamlet of Indian Politics—it is a term of praise, though, not of derogation. How well he can present the two sides of a case, but refrain from drawing a conclusion of his own! When he is uncomfortable, he hedges, and we don't know where he is, or where we are. Subhas once made the complaint—

When a crisis comes, you often do not succeed in making up your mind one way or the other—with the result that to the public you appear as if you are riding two horses.

In 1939, l'affaire Subhas caused Jawaharlal a great deal of inner struggle; he made a timid attempt at mediation between Gandhi and Subhas, felt more and more miserable as he failed to fill the breach, and wrote in January 1940 to Edward Thompson—

I always feel that I can be of more use to India outside India. The feeling that I do not quite fit in here, pursues and depresses me.

Rather an ominous feeling in the future Prime Minister of India!

This marvellous capacity to see both sides of every question was a priceless blessing indeed, though it often weakened Jawaharlal's power of action and even prevented him from giving the right lead on crucial occasions. The language question was a case in point. Jawaharlal conceded that the regional languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, etc.) "are ancient languages, with a rich inheritance each spoken by many millions of persons, each tied up inextricably with the life, culture and ideas of the masses, as well as of the upper classes". What was the obvious conclusion to be drawn from this? None of the regional

languages—not even Hindi—should be newly put in a position of superiority over the others. Since, however, we do need an 'official language' for inter-state purposes, it might as well continue to be English, since it is actually in the field and has many other advantages as well. Yet Jawaharlal was not quite sure of himself, wriggled uncomfortably, and wouldn't give a clear categorical lead to the country. It was our great good fortune that this dreamer and idealist, this humanist and artist in words—and not any mere politician or unscrupulous go-getter—was our Prime Minister for seventeen years. But we had our legitimate anxieties also. How would he act in a real crisis? Would he yet once again admirably present both sides of the case—action and inaction, not to mention the third course, wrong action—but leave the actual decision to others, or allow developments to overwhelm him and us? In the past, while he invariably shone as a great Lighthouse, he left the actual steering of the national ship to others—to his father, to Gandhi, to Sardar Patel. But he became more and more solitary as he grew older and as his problems as Prime Minister multiplied. Yet whatever happened, nothing could soil him, nothing could affect the purity of his mind or dim his flame-like patriotism. There were strange satisfactions, too, for how very reassuring to meet a great man who, at least in his moments of indecision, was rather like many of us, one who moaned the general hurt of mankind much as we did, one who had humanity and integrity, and humility enough to write—

I fear I am an ineffective politician at any time and I have no taste whatever for the variety of politics that has lately developed,

so far as the failings are concerned I plead guilty to them, well realizing that I have the misfortune to possess them.

Like a coward I crept away (to the hills) when my work lay in Allahabad.

Humour too never failed him, and wit and irony were ready in the armoury, though used very sparingly. And with what matchless candour and even courage he limned his "self-portrait"! Topical writing and journalism wither with the setting

of the Sun, but Jawaharlal's topical writing is touched by his humanity, and so even his journalism, at its best, glows with the incandescence of art.

The second World War meant a new series of arrests and imprisonments for Jawaharlal. At his first trial he made the now celebrated statement—

I stand before you, Sir, as an individual being tried for certain offences against the State. You are a symbol of that State. But I am something more than an individual also; I, too, am a symbol at the present moment, a symbol of Indian nationalism, resolved to break away from the British Empire and achieve the independence of India. It is not me that you are seeking to judge and condemn, but rather the hundreds and millions of the people of India, and that is a large task even for a proud Empire. Perhaps it may be that, although I am standing before you on my trial, it is the British Empire itself that is on its trial before the bar of the world. There are more powerful forces at work today than courts of law; there are elemental urges of freedom and food and security which are moving vast masses of people...

It is a small matter to me what happens to me in this trial or subsequently. Individuals count for little; they come and go, as I shall go when my time is up. Seven times I have been tried and convicted by British authority in India, and many years of my life lie buried within prison walls. An eighth time or a ninth, and a few more years, make little difference.

But it is no small matter what happens to India and her millions of sons and daughters...

There was verily a ninth time, and the 'Quit India' movement found him (with his many colleagues) in the Aga Khan Palace. It was during this incarceration that Jawaharlal wrote his *Discovery of India*. He must have written at terrific speed and under the pressure of heavy concentration, for this semi-historical work of 600 pages was the product of but five months' labour (April to September 1944). The principal merit of the *Discovery* is that it lets us see the mind of its author, helps us to forge the links of our racial memory, and firmly turns our face to the future—but only after a long, affectionate, an understanding, an almost lingering gaze at the past. The quest—the vicissitudes in the thrilling voyage of discovery—the deserts, the oases, the hills, the streams, the mountain-tops, the hidden vastnesses—the men of might that once had their days of glory

but are now nearly covered by oblivion—the clash of races, the fall of empires, the liquidation of dynasties—the abiding structures of thought, the marvels of architecture, the dazzling climbs of epic and drama—the variegated kaleidoscopic succession of comedies and tragedies of unpredictable circumstance played on this vast theatre that is India over a space of 3000 years—all are here recaptured with a sure but unlaboured artistry. Never before had Jawaharlal written with more naturalness, more deep conviction, or more homely beauty. The portrait of Mr. M. A. Jinnah might almost have come from the pen of Lytton Strachey—

Mr. Jinnah is a lone figure even in the Muslim League, keeping apart from his closest co-workers, widely but distantly respected, more feared than liked. About his ability as a politician there is no doubt, but somehow that ability is tied up with the peculiar conditions of British rule in India today. He shines as a lawyer-politician, as a tactician, as one who thinks that he holds the balance between nationalist India and the British Power. . . . He fits into this present pattern; whether he or anybody else will fit into a new pattern it is difficult to say. What passion moves him, what object does he strive for? Or is it that he has no dominating passion except the pleasure he has in playing a fascinating political game of chess in which he often has an opportunity to say 'check'? He seems to have a hatred for the Congress which has grown with the years. His aversions and dislikes are obvious, but what does he like? With all his strength and tenacity, he is a strangely negative person whose appropriate symbol might well be a 'no'.

Since Pakistan did emerge at last, could we say that the 'no' had become an 'yes'? Perhaps; yet, with the birth of Bangla Desh in 1971, the 'yes' seems to be reverting to a 'no'. How could the tree whose seed was 'no' become ever a triumphant 'yes'!

Of course, we do not read Jawaharlal's books on Indian or world history merely to widen the range of our knowledge; we go to these books, we linger in their company, we return to them again and again, for a very different reason—to know Jawaharlal Nehru, to watch the leaps of his agile intellect, to follow the sinuous movements of his singular sensibility, to exchange pulses with this great son of India who is verily the greatest internationalist of our time. Nor should we forget that

many of the so-called 'Resolutions'—they are essays in political science, really—passed by the Indian National Congress during the last thirty years of his life were actually Jawaharlal's handiwork, and make a permanent contribution to political literature in India. In his less formal writings (the *Glimpses* and the *Discovery*) he achieved an attractive individual style by his very anxiety to avoid "style". The precise unique word comes, pat, the citations—from Asokan inscriptions, from the French and the English romantics, from T. S. Eliot's poetry, from Carlyle, from Swift, from Hsün Tsang, from Aurobindo, from Tagore—are engagingly apt, and the fusion of reverie and argument, reminiscence and self-examination rings sincere and rings true.

Wisely and widely learned, in the ancients and the moderns, enjoying the companionship of great thoughts and great minds, Jawaharlal's writings too breathe the life-giving air of culture and lightly shimmer with a steady glow.

Soon after the *Discovery* was published, Jawaharlal found himself propelled into high office, first as Vice-President of the Governor-General's Executive Council, and presently, on 15 August 1947, as Prime Minister of India, the 'partition' coming into effect at the same time. He made a brief, but memorable, speech at midnight, the fateful moment that brought the nectar of freedom in one hand and the poison of partition in the other (*amritam* *visha* *samsrishtam*).

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

The speech was remarkable as much for what is said as for what is left unsaid. No mention of 'partition' here! Nehru is reported to have remarked privately that the hope behind the partition was that "by cutting off the head we will get rid of the headache"! And Gandhi had said that he could see "rivers

of blood" flowing in the aftermath of Partition. Such being the background, it was hardly surprising that Nehru had to speak as he did, with subdued buoyancy and even an undercurrent of deep sadness.

For almost seventeen years he was India's Prime Minister, steadily rising in stature as a world statesman, but also suffering, as the years passed, a slow erosion of his dynamism. Those hectic years were packed with excitement, anxiety, exertion, disillusionment—culminating at last in the catastrophe of the Chinese invasion in 1962. His hold on the Congress (especially after the death of Sardar Patel in 1950) was unquestioned, he led his Party to victory in three general elections, he helped to launch three Five Year Plans, he made the voice of India heard in the counsels of the United Nations. Few men had ever borne a burden so great and for so long a time, as Jawaharlal had as Prime Minister of India. One by one his trusted senior colleagues disappeared from the scene; some stood aloof, and were sharply critical of his policies and administration. Living in a continual blaze of opinion, action and publicity, his misfortune in his last years was his solitariness. His real strength lay, not in the Party nor in the Government—the former became more and more a thing of shreds and patches, and the latter a ramshackle old vehicle compelled to race at a speed and carry a load it was not equal to—but rather in the confidence of the mass of the people in him; in other words, in his charisma. He was never so happy as when he was with the people: to them—whether they were a group of peasants or a mass rally, a bunch of children or 'Holi' revellers, a meeting of authors or a mob of university students—he could speak as man to men, as a piece of humanity to all humanity, each word sending forth creepers of understanding and sympathy, each accent instinct with fellow-feeling and unpossessive love. He had to speak endlessly, and he often spoke longer than was quite necessary; but, then, public-speaking had become for him a kind of tonic to his jaded nerves. Latterly, his speeches sounded thinner, staler, wearier, and less profitable than the speeches in the first years of his Prime Ministership. But always he could suddenly throw out words charged with purpose, words that have since gone into general currency. There is no better des-

cription of the function of a University than what he said on 13 December 1947 at Allahabad:

A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards ever higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duty adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation prosper or a people grow in stature?

One could easily imagine how Jawaharlal, were he now alive, would view the unquiet un-university-like Indian university scene today! Of ends and means Nehru spoke at Columbia University, taking the strictly Gandhian line:

I think ... there is always a close and intimate relationship between the end we aim at and the means adopted to attain it. Even if the end is right but the means are wrong, it will vitiate the end or divert us in a wrong direction. Means and ends are thus intimately and inextricably connected and cannot be separated.

Talking of culture, Nehru put forth his own view of Indian history and insinuated a warning as well:

My own view of Indian history is that we can almost measure the growth and the advance of India and the decline of India by relating them to periods when India had her mind open to the outside world and when she wanted to close it up. The more she closed it up, the more static she became.

Nehru was of course a prophet of modernity, he was a votary of science and an admirer of the Jet Age, but he knew also the need for roots. In his Azad Memorial Lecture he gave vent to a little introspection and remarked:

I have often wondered that if our race forgot the Buddha, the Upanishads and the great epics, what then will it be like? It would be uprooted and would lose the basic characteristics which have clung to it and given it distinction throughout these long ages. India would cease to be India.

It would not be difficult to cite from Nehru's speeches pas-

sages marred by excessive prolixity and wobbling, passages revealing the tired disillusioned politician or the baffled Head of the Administration. But even at his worst, his speeches had the redeeming graces of sincerity and integrity. His bona fides could never be questioned; nor his sense of commitment that had the colour and intensity of love. Rajaji once remarked that love cannot be demanded, it can only be deserved; to those, then, shall it be given who deserve it most. It is because Jawaharlal Nehru deserved it that love was given to him in such abundant measure. "The Flute of Krishna"—so Bal Gangadhar Kher described Jawaharlal the public speaker. And *Shanker's Weekly* once carried a cartoon showing the Niagara feeling small by the side of Jawaharlal in America, for he had apparently spoken almost without end! A tireless speaker, he was often on his feet for hours. On one occasion, with sage-like Rajaji (he was then Premier) by his side, Jawaharlal addressed a mammoth gathering on the Madras speech, and the AIR broadcast it in its entirety. I sat before my receiver in far-off Waltair and listened in the quiet of the night. The whole man—leader, fighter, statesman, patriot, the great commoner, the warm-hearted human being—was revealed in that extraordinary speech that went on and on for hours. No doubt the Prime Minister was making a policy speech; but the Prime Minister was also a man; and the man was Jawaharlal. He was talking, but he was also thinking aloud. He was reminiscing, arguing, philosophizing; he was now hitting hard, he was now cracking jokes. It was an unending speech almost, and still when it ended at last, one felt rather sad it was over. What was the secret of the fascination that Jawaharlal the speaker exercised on the mass of Indian humanity? No doubt it was because the speaker was Jawaharlal; but an even greater reason was this—his theme was India, or India and the World, or humanity's trials and defeats and hopes and achievements. As he faced the multitude and spoke through the mike, he seemed alternately to shudder and to glow, and he always managed to communicate something of both to the rapt congregations. There was always this rapport between him and his audience, and here really was the secret of Jawaharlal's success as a speaker.

XVI The Novel: Themes, Backgrounds, Types

The 'novel' as a literary phenomenon is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories, and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back by several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more than a century that the novel—the long sustained piece of prose fiction—has occurred and taken root in India. One might, of course, protest and say that Sanskrit works like Bana's *Kadambari* and Subandhu's *Vasavadatta* are also novels, but the description would not really fit; and, besides, these were isolated marvels. For the novel, properly so called, we have to wait till the latter half of the nineteenth century when the Western impact on India's cultural front had resulted, among other things, in the development of formal written prose in the regional languages, first as a functional, and presently as an artistic, medium. With the help of Indian scholars, Christian missionaries had translated the Bible into the living languages of India, and the prose medium thus brought into currency came handy for official use, for petitions, records, journalism, and for the translation of Sanskrit classics into the spoken languages of the people. The translation of Western classics, including novels, followed. Such renderings could take the form of adaptation, abridgement, or even the Bottomian kind of transformation. The next step was the composition of original works, in distant imitation or under the inspiration of Western models.

Novels have been, and are being published in a dozen Indian languages, and also in English; and the reciprocal influence between the novel in English and the novel in the regional languages has been rather more intimate and purposive than such influence in the fields of poetry or drama. And this has, of course, been facilitated by the comparative ease with which a novel (as dis-

tipect from poetry or drama) can be translated from one to another of the many languages current in the country. While a truly comprehensive and reliable literary history of modern India is yet to be undertaken, the main sign-posts seem to be clear enough. It was in Bengal that the 'literary renaissance' first manifested itself; but almost immediately afterwards, the signs of 'new life' were to be seen in Madras, Bombay and other parts of India as well.

Perhaps the first novel written in Bengali was *Akaler Gharer Dulal* ('Spoilt Son of a Rich Family'), which came out (after serial publication earlier) in 1858. The wastrel elder brother, the redeeming younger brother, and the deceitful uncle keep up the interest of the story, and the novel itself seems to have been a sort of *Jack Wilton* in the history of the novel in India, a pioneering work if nothing else. However, the real beginnings were with the work of the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94). His first published effort—*Rajmohan's Wife* (1864)—was in English. It was followed next year by *Durgeshnadin* in Bengali, which appeared in an English translation in 1890. *Kapalkundala*, *Vishavriksha* ('The Poison Tree: A Tale of Hindu Life in Bengal'), *Krishnakanta Uyil* ('Krishnakanta's Will'), *Anandamath*, *Devi Chaudhurani* and other novels appeared between 1866 and 1886, and several of them came out sooner or later in English versions also. In the meantime, Raj Lakshmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife* was published in 1876, Toru Dutt's *Bianca* in 1878, Kali Krishna Lahiri's *Roshinara* in 1881, H. Dutt's *Bijoy Chand* in 1888, and Khetrapal Chakravarti's *Sarata and Hingana* (1895). These novels, written in English, have for us today no more than an antiquarian or historical interest.

In his life-time, Bankim reigned as the literary dictator of renascent Bengal, and while he was a master of the romantic as well as the historical novel, he also frankly confessed: "I am a teacher or nothing". If romance was his forte, he was no stranger to comedy or humour either. In both 'The Poison Tree' and 'Krishnakanta's Will', a married man falls in love with a young widow, and there are the usual consequences. The sad plight and disturbing influence of the widow in Hindu joint families and generally in Hindu society is to prove a recurrent

motif in Indian fiction. In his historical novels, Bankim was obviously inspired by Tod's *Annals of Rajasthan* and Scott's historical romances. *Anandamath* (1882) is Bankim's best-known, though not his greatest, novel. In this and other novels, Bankim introduced *sannyasis* (wandering ascetics) into the fictional narratives; and like the Hindu widow, the *sannyasi* too (as Guru, Guide, Swami, Fakir, Yogi, Mahatma) figures often in Indian fiction sometimes as a beneficent, sometimes as a malevolent and sometimes as a merely ludicrous, character. It was over a decade after he had passed away that he suddenly leapt into national fame as the inspired author of the song, *Bande-mataram*, which is imbedded in *Anandamath*. "The *mantra* had been given", said Sri Aurobindo at the time of the 'partition' of Bengal, "and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism". The novelist was posthumously hailed as a Rishi, and his novels appeared in translation in many regional languages and influenced novelists all over India. Apart from their absorbing 'story interest', Bankim's novels were seen to be in some measure the testaments of a seer's wisdom, and readers did not hesitate to infer from them the Bible of the new patriotism. And what exactly was this gospel? Sri Aurobindo has summed it up in a few lines:

It was the gospel of fearless strength and force which he preached under a veil and in images in *Anandamath* and *Devi Chaudhurani*. And he had an inspiring unerring vision of the moral strength which must be at the back of the outer force. He perceived that the first element of the moral strength must be *tyaga*, complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation.... Again, he perceived that the second element of the moral strength needed must be self-discipline and organization. This truth he expressed in the elaborate training of Devi Chaudhurani for her work, in the strict rules of the Association of the 'Anandamath' and in the pictures of perfect organization which those books contain. Lastly, he perceived that the third element of moral strength must be the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. The religion of patriotism—that is the master idea of Bankim's writings.

Excellent story-teller though he was, nevertheless prophecy was Bankim's unique gift as a novelist. Since his time, this pre-occupation with patriotism in one form or another—now as Indian nationalism, now as Muslim separatism leading to the

creation of Pakistan, now as strong regionalism leading to the creation of the linguistic States, and recently as revolutionary Marxism in its different varieties: each form of patriotism with its own call for *tyaga*, its particular brand of volunteer corps or *sena*, and its fanatic adherence to a set of dogmas—has been characteristic of some of the significant fiction produced in the country. Bankim's sterling vision may be lacking, but not his desire to make the novel a means of political education! Many a novelist would, if he could, be a prophet of things to come, an engineer of tomorrow's world.

Although generalizations are hazardous, the novel in Bengal (and, generally speaking, the novel in India) may be said to have passed through three stages. "When Bankim wrote", says Annada Sankar Ray, himself a prominent Bengali novelist, "the chief question was how to restore the national self-respect. In Rabindranath's time, it was how to bridge the East and the West. In this dynamic age, it is how to identify ourselves with the common people". There is some overlapping, and there is also the post-Independence age that has witnessed the crash of all our hopes and the enervation of this deepening despair.

Rabindranath Tagore is for the many the author of the English *Gitanjali*, a poet incarnating the spirit of India, a prophet of the Religion of Man. But as we have seen in an earlier chapter, Tagore was a very considerable novelist also. After one or two pieces written under the giant shadow of Bankim, Tagore achieved his first success with *Choker Bali* (1902), now translated into English as *Binodini* by Krishna Kripalani. "Here for the first time in Indian literature", says Dr. Sukumar Sen, "the actions and reactions arising out of the impact of the minds of individuals propel the plot, and not so much the external happenings". *Binodini* is the story of a young widow too, but Tagore's is a subtler, more convincing, psychological study than either of the two novels of Bankim which exploit a similar theme. The tangle of emotional involvements is perverse as in a Hardy novel: Bihari subconsciously loves Asha, who is married to (and loves) Mahendra, who in his turn loves the widow Binodini, who for her part loves Bihari. Binodini the widow has of course no 'right' to love, no right to happiness in life. She tries the role of temptress for a while, and has Mahendra in her coils:

but it is the steady Bihari that finally claims her consecrated love. Bihari too is finally drawn to her, but a marriage between them, in a novel that appeared in 1902, would have been artistically too facile a solution, and would besides have shocked the orthodox public. Binodini is presented as "the eternal feminine, trudging through the ages in quest of her lover, weary with pain, distracted with longing, bursting with the throb of desire, trailing through poetry, through song, until there she stands on the other shore crying, 'Ferry me across, O boatman!'" Rohini in Bankim's novel, Binodini in Tagore's, and Abhaya and Kiranmayi in Sarat Chandra's are widows all, but there is an increasingly bolder approach to the actualities of life; and the more recent the study, it is also the more forthright in its defiance of convention and affirmation of the widow's—even the widow's—right to life, freedom and love. In Tagore's *Yogayog*, there is the unforgettable portrait of Kumudini, an angel wedded to a satyr; like Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Kumudini walks out of her husband's house, but unlike her—but like the heroine of R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*—she is driven to return to her husband after all, hoping for the best!

If Tagore began, first by imitating Bankim, and only then (with *Choker Bali*) found his own voice, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) also went through a Bankim stage and a Tagore stage of imitative writing before outgrowing them both in his best work in *Srikanta*, *Grihadaha*, *Pather Dabi*, *Bipradas* and *Ses Prasna*. *Srikanta* has been translated into English by K. C. Sen and Theodosia Thompson, and some other novels too have appeared in English. Sarat Chandra identified himself with the down-and-outs, and boldly portrayed the tears and sweat of the lower middle and have-not classes. This realism, however, didn't dry up—in this his work foreshadowed the best fiction of Mulk Raj Anand in English—his abiding faith in the essential nobility of man. Of Sarat Chandra it could be said that he was the complete novelist who used his art simultaneously as a camera, as a surgeon's knife, and also as a chalice of hope.

Trailing behind the Bankim-Tagore-Sarat 'triumph glory', some other outstanding novelists—Tarasankar Bandyopadhyaya, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyaya, Manik Bandyopadhyaya, Naini Bhaumik, Gajendrakumar Mitra, Manoj Basu, to name only a

few—have been scouring the ocean of everyday life in Bengal and presenting artistically the calm as well as the storms, the surface froth as well as the unplumbed depths. Bibhuti Bhushan's *Pather Panchali* portrays two unforgettable characters, the children Apu and Durga. Although Manik, in novels like 'The Boatman of the Padma' (1936), writes as though iron has entered his soul, his compassion too finds play and ultimately redeems his portraits. In his *Dhaukhana*, Naini Bhaumik projects an Utopia that is to be born as the result of the 'inevitable' class war. Manoj Basu's *Jalajangal* has been translated into English as *The Forest Goddess* by Barindra Nath Bose. Here the forest is shown as re-asserting its primal sway over man, keeping him in awe yet also extending its arms of protection to him.

The vicissitudes of the Bengali Novel foreshadow more or less the vicissitudes of the Novel in India. The Western breeze blows, sometimes directly, and sometimes—and more significantly—indirectly, its velocity chastened in the ample spaces of Bengal. Before 1947 (the year of the withdrawal of Britain's political connection), the English models were the major outside influence on the Indian novel. After independence, however, novelists in India have shown themselves susceptible to the influence of American and European (especially Russian) models, and also models from the Oriental countries. The novel in India, whatever its medium (English or one of the regional languages), is subject to the same or at least similar discontents and limitations. There are certain stock responses, which are found almost everywhere. The novelist is apt either to turn in nostalgia to the past and glorify and idealize it, or to turn to the present in a gesture of protest if not disgust. There is the universal currency of sex and crime, and the explosion of cheap paperbackbacks with their garish jackets. There is the vogue for the serialized spineless sentimental fiction—sugared romances on the instalment plan, standardized and stereotyped attitudes, patriotic pirouettes with 'love' superadded somehow, and contrived 'happy' endings—that thrives because of the mass of popular illustrated weekly and monthly magazines with their vast clientele. After the advent of independence, the more serious novelist has shown how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by the tragedy of the 'partition'; how in spite of the freedom

there is continuing (or even galloping) corruption, inefficiency, poverty and cumulative misery; how, after all, the mere replacement of the white sahib by the brown sahib cannot effect a radical cure for the besetting ills of India. When independence came, the serious novelist in a sense found his occupation gone, for the traditional villain of the piece—foreign rule—was no more in the picture. Making a new start as it were, the novelist shifted his lantern this side and that, made his probes, and found little to satisfy him. The old narrow loyalties were seen to wax as eloquent as ever. Communal, linguistic, casteist passions were seen to come into the open with accelerated frequency. While talk of 'emotional integration' filled the air, the *terra firma* only witnessed the agonizing spectacle of a divided house with a deceptive floor and a precarious roof. It required the shock therapy of brutal aggression by the Chinese in October-November 1962 and by Pakistan in September 1965 to forge in the mass consciousness a new sense of unity and urgency and a stern common purpose reminiscent of the peak moments of the Gandhian age. But the moment the external pressure relaxed, the mood passed too, and once again the winds of disunity and purposelessness began to blow again.

While it is perhaps true that more novels are published today than all other kinds of serious literature—poetry, drama, essays, etc.—put together, still there are not many novelists who are able to make a reasonably comfortable life out of their art, unless of course they are willing to turn out 'popular' novels (that is to say, crime spiced with sex, or *vice versa*) with electronic precision and regularity. Great minds are not often attracted to the ranks of creative novelists: such a novelist as Annada Sankar Ray, for example, who retired prematurely from the Indian Civil Service and has settled down at Shantiniketan to devote himself entirely to creative writing is but the rare exception rather than the rule. Amateurishness is still the general law, and the average novelist doesn't take pains enough, he doesn't go deep enough,—he is too superficial to achieve a complete confrontation of the contemporary human situation, and he is also too lazy to achieve mastery of the craft of writing. Quite genuine talent reveals itself from time to time, but there is little growth, and atrophy sets in too soon. There

have been far too many promissory notes that have remained unredeemed.

The difficulties facing the Indian novelist are, no doubt, real enough. What is he to write about? To which 'patron' is he to offer his particular 'crocus'? Escapism—historical fiction in terms of nostalgia is one kind of escapism, sentimental romance in another—is easy, but it soon palls. Must the novelist's be a scientific or realistic—or even naturalistic—approach to contemporary social problems? A clinical probe into society's sores? A drain-inspector's report? A descent into the dark alleys, the gambling dens, the back-street whore-houses? Should the novelist write for entertainment—or edification? Should he write for the sophisticated—or for the masses? And the masses being still largely illiterate, what is one to do except turn out film-scripts! Again, is the novel to provide a cure for boredom, or is it to be conceived as an engine of essential knowledge, a campaign for the eradication of abuses, or as something truly autonomous—art for sake's sake! And what kind of language is the novelist to fashion as his medium: is he to cultivate the exotic classical graces of purity and ornateness, or is he to plump for the home-spun rhythms of everyday speech? And there is the question of questions: in which language is the novel to be written? The problem of the choice of a subject, the choice of the medium, the choice of the technique, the choice of the audience—this problem of choice at various levels bristles with endless difficulties. How is the novelist to choose a subject of 'burning' local interest that will have relevance elsewhere as well, and at all times? How is he to hammer out a perfect language that is vivid and alive, yet also classical in its adequacy, strength and finish? How is he to touch his writing with the high seriousness that may compel the attention of the intellectuals and also sustain the interest of the nearly illiterate? In short, how is the novelist to be more than a scribbler—an entertainer—a cheap druggist—and grow into a serious novelist, a recorder of the human situation in terms of beauty, power and universality? There are no summary answers to these questions. The novelist is a man and an artist: and hence what he writes can comprehend all that comprises man's life and can exploit all the graces and freedoms of art. But what he writes

must neither merely outrage humanity nor totally deny the imperatives of art. The novel is a means of expression for the writer, and it is ultimately born of understanding and love. The novelist's understanding (of man, of Nature, of God) has to be as total, and as integral, as possible; and his love (or compassion) has to be a total power too. Such understanding and power will forge their own appropriate means—language, form, technique—for communicating the totality of the vision and the whole power of the love to the readers. Whatever the subject—a patch of past history, a segment of contemporary life, a problem in ethics or politics, a revolutionary eruption in the body-politic—the novelist's understanding and love will make his writing transcend the merely local and controversial, and attain the vitality and dignity of creative literature.

Notwithstanding the peculiar occupational ailments that beset the novelist in India, it is gratifying to note that the novel is a living and evolving literary genre, and is trying, in the hands of its practitioners, a fusion of form, substance and expression that is recognizably Indian, yet also bearing the marks of universality. The novel written in the spoken languages of the people is rather more enterprising, richer in content, wider in range than the novel in English which, especially in recent years, tends more and more to address itself to a Western audience. But, in essentials, the novel in India today is really all of a piece.

Novels whose action is set by the side of a river are a category by themselves. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has advanced the ingenious theory that, for the Aryans in India, the 'river cult' is a symbol of their pre-Indian existence—a survival of the memories of the Danube! Be that as it may, the river does evoke in the Indian an attachment almost personal. An early Assamese novel, Rajanikanta Bardoloi's *Miri-Jiyari* ('A Miri Maid', 1895), said to have been influenced by Scott and Bankim, makes the river 'Subanasri' almost a participant in the action. Novels in English with a river background are K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) evoking the village Alavanti-on-Cauvery, Humayun Kabir's *Men and Rivers* (1945) with its action on the banks of the Padma, and of course R. K. Narayan's novels centred in Malgudi-on-Sarayu. In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, the river Hemavathy is a person and a presence,

and in his *The Serpent and the Rope* the Ganges is a goddess almost. But a river like the Padma can be, now an affectionate mother, and anon a vengeful fury! The river in India is a feminine power and personality, and the land (and men living on it) must woo her and deserve her love if their hopes of fruitfulness and security are to be realized.

In the Assamese novel, Beena Barua's *Senji Patar Kahni*, the theme is life in the tea-gardens of Assam. Plantation-life in Assam comprises many linguistic and racial strands—Assamese, Bengali, Telugu, Adivasi, European—and there is ample room for the clash of interests and temperaments. Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a powerful study of life in an Assamese tea-estate, and the villain of the story is the European assistant manager. Part of the action in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* takes place in a coffee estate (the Skeffington's) in South India. In the more recent Manohar Malgonkar's *Combat of Shadows* also, the action takes place, as in Anand's novel, in an Assamese tea-estate, but here the political situation is different and the human drama rather more sophisticated.

History as the theme of creative fiction seems indeed to exercise a special fascination for many an Indian novelist of yesterday and today. In Marathi, Hari Narayan Apte turned significant chapters from Maratha and Rajput history into vivid romances like *Ushahkal*, and in his novels he tried to fuse the fighting idealism of patriots like Tilak with the liberalism of reformers like Chiplonkar and Agarkar. As early as 1903, T. Ramakrishna tried a historical novel in English, *Padmini*. It is a romance of the sixteenth century leading up to the great battle of Talikote which brought to an end the "never-to-be-forgotten" Vijayanagar Empire. Romesh Chander Dutt's *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) and Sir Jogendra Singh's *Nur Jahan* (1909) are also historical romances. Vimala Raina's *Ambapali* (1962) takes us back to the days of Ajat Shatru and tells the story of the Vaishali dancer who rejected a King's love and preferred to enter the Buddha's fold. Likewise, A. S. P. Ayyar's *Baladitya* (1930) and *Chanakya and Chandragupta* (1952) try to recapture life in ancient India. Ayyar's portraits of Baladitya and Yasodharma, and of Alexander, Chanakya and Chandragupta are rich with convincing detail. There are also numerous minor

characters, mainly fictional, and they serve to highlight the central characters in the two novels.

Coming to modern times, Tagore's *The Home and the World* and *Four Chapters* present the issue between ends and means in politics in the context of the revolutionary movements of the twentieth century. Mulk Raj Anand's *The Sword and the Sickle* and K. A. Abbas's *Inqilab* both roughly cover the politics of the twenties. Two of the best novels about the Gandhian civil disobedience movement in the early thirties are K. S. Venkataramani's *Kandan the Patriot* (1932) and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). The second world war period in India, the growing chasm between the Hindu and Muslim communities and between India and Britain, the Bengal hungers, the 'Quit India' movement, and the mounting frustration and misery are covered in novels like N. S. Phadke's *Leaves in the August Wind* (being the English version of his own Marathi novel), Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) and Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* (1957). Novels on the 'partition' horrors and bestiality are legion, but it is not often they transcend sensationalism and achieve the discipline of art. As Devendra Satyarthi put it, "No literature based on hate and prejudice can really be great. It was a drama of degradation and shame, a drama of human decay, showing how the minds of the two communities were poisoned by the dogma of the two-nation theory". One of the more satisfying imaginative records of the Partition is Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956). The whole horror is there, but humanity and compassion are there too. In Balachandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1959) also we get, towards the end, glimpses of partition horrors; and in Manohar Malgonkar's *Distant Drum*, again, the veil is lifted a little over what happened in those fateful days in Delhi and later in Kashmir. Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* explores more fully the origins of the two-nation theory and presents in some detail the sheer frenzy that possessed people in the Punjab in August 1947. Like war and revolution, civil strife of the kind that was witnessed in parts of India in 1947 was verily a bull-dozer that levelled up things, leaving an ominous calm in the wake of the precedent destructive storm. Humanity uproot-

ed, humanity mutilated, humanity massacred—for the artistic projection of the things that happened in 1947, not even the images of Dante's *Inferno* can possibly prove adequate.

Like these essays in historical fiction, the novels of social criticism and social protest also form a distinctive group. Romesh Chunder Dutt's *The Lake of Palms* (1909), a study of social life in Bengal towards the close of the last century, presents interesting characters, and the action climaxes in the marriage of the young widow, Sudha, to Sarat. T. Ramakrishna's *The Dive for Death* (1912) is woven round certain superstitions that make cowards of the characters. S. K. Ghosh's *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna* (1909) portrays in Barath "a union of the highest ideals of the East and West". In S. M. Mitra's *Hindupore: A Peep behind the Indian Unrest* (1909), the political slant is rather more prominent than the social scene. Sir Jogendra Singh's *Nasrin* (1915) is an attempt to expose the life of self-indulgence characteristic of some of the nawabs and taluqdars of yesterday. The heroine of Sir Jogendra's *Kamni* (1931) is a barber's daughter who, after many difficulties, finds asylum in the house of a Miss Greenwood and succumbs presently to brain fever, while her lover, Ratan, decides to start a school. Balkrishna's *The Love of Kusuma*, another novel with the accent on social life in the Punjab, mixes realism and romance in the delineation of Mohun and Kusuma. Life in the Punjab, again, is the theme of Firoz Khan Noon's *Scented Dust*. In Dewan Sharar's *The Gong of Shiva*, love and intrigue and crime have full play. Kamini loves Brij Lal but is forced to marry another, the cruel Ram Nath, who is killed by Kamini's brother; and so we have a series of chain reactions engineered by the 'critical mass' of a society that is neither securely grounded in tradition nor is properly emancipated. Hari Singh Gour's *His Only Love* is a study of the consequences of the emancipation of Indian women. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) is a picture of Muslim life in modern Delhi.

In A. Madhavian's *Thillai Govindan*, there is the portrait of a young intellectual who rebels against the mere formalism of what passes for religion; his *Kusika's Stories*, again, presents the picture of a traditional society that is in need of drastic change. On the other hand, A. Subramaniam's *Indira Devi* decries the

validity of reformism in the shape of inter-racial marriages, inter-caste dinners, and so on. The fictional studies in *Life's Shadows* and *A Daughter's Shadow* by Kumara Guru (C. Subramania Ayyar) are a mild protest against the "Westernization of the soul of India that is now in progress". Kumara Guru's fiction is an extraordinary blend of psychological analysis, social criticism and special pleading. Narration, recapitulation, diaries, letters, sermonizing, philosophizing, all are thrown together in a seemingly haphazard way, but in the end they are seen to fuse into artistic wholes. Before the advent of the British, the 'joint family' imposed a certain discipline on its members, and this discipline was linked up with religion and ethics, and brought out certain graces and ensured a certain amount of social security. English education has ended that coherent fabric, and today parents and children, brother and brother, and even husband and wife, find shadows sprawling between them, dividing and isolating them. This is the recurrent theme of Kumara Guru's unusual psychological studies set in the background of a changing Hindu society—changing, but not necessarily for the better. The same theme is projected, but in a more traditional artistic form, in S. Nagarajan's *Athawar House* (1939). Like some of the great European novels that detail the slow changes in close-knit families over a period of years—like John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*—*Athawar House* covers a period of fifteen years in the history of a Maratha brahmin family in South India. Like Old Jolyon in Galsworthy's novel, Gopinath is the patriarch of Athawar House. But with the relentless passage of the years comes also the steady erosion of old values and prized traditions. When the novel ends, Gopinath is dead, and an 'un-orthodox' marriage takes place between a Maratha brahmin girl and a Tamil *smartha* brahmin boy. The walls of Jericho have begun to fall indeed! In V. V. Chintamani's *Vedantam: The Clash of Traditions*, again, there is a study of the impact of Western culture upon a traditional South Indian family. In Narayan's *The Sweet-Vendor* (1967), the elderly Jagan's son, Mali, starts living with a half-American half-Korean girl to whom he is not even formally married, thereby causing a ripple on the placid waters of Malgudi-on-Sarayu.

Social life in a country of the size of India is so full of vagaries and varieties that the novelist with an observant eye and an understanding heart will find the material spread out before him to be literally inexhaustible. Some of the best studies of social life are, naturally enough, in the regional languages; and it is not easy to translate the racy idiom of everyday speech into English. This is particularly true of life in the countryside, the seaside, the hillside where life has, perhaps, changed very little indeed during the last two thousand years! Urban life in India attracts the novelist by its excitements, perversions, sophistications, and violent alternations between affluence and poverty, splendour and squalor; but the interior, the areas of obscurity and inaccessibility have their attractions too, and sometimes bring out the best in the creative novelist. There are regional novelists like Tarasankar (Birbhum, Bengal), K. S. Karant (South Canara) and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (Kuttanad) who have tried to immortalise in creative fiction the genius of particular regions or localities. Munshi Premchand, the Hindi-Urdu novelist, revealed in *Godan* and other fictional narratives his sense of intimacy with the sons of the soil. Karant's Kannada masterpiece, *Marali Mannige* (translated into English by A. N. Moorthy Rao as *The Return to the Soil*, 1955), is a classic of its kind. Sivasankara Pillai's *Ranti-tangazhi* (translated by M. A. Shakoor into English as *Two Measures of Rice*, 1968) describes the life of the peasants in the difficult period of transition from the old feudalism to the new wage economy. The labourer is involved in conflicts—political, social, economic—and he is perforce obliged to make the uneasy passage from innocence to experience. Apart from its sociological or even anthropological value, the novel scores mainly on account of its convincing characterization. These simple people for whom sufferance is a birthmark or badge of limitation are verily the salt of the earth. In Marathi, Vyankatesh Madgulkar has done a similar service in his novel translated into English as *The Village Had No Walls* (1959). Like peasants in out-of-the-way tracts, fisher-folk living by the seaside have known—perhaps for thousands of years—the same bare nude hard life, struggling yet being at peace with the elements. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* (translated into English by V. K. Narayana

Menon) is a poignant record of the life of the seafaring folk on the coast of Allepey fringing the Arabian Sea. The peril, heroism, fatality and humanity of the fisherfolk's life is brought out with a vividness, a sense of mounting crisis, and the tremors of tragedy often remind us of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Another novel from Kerala, S. Menon Marath's *The Sale of an Island* (1968) is about a group of people who live in an island near Kuttanad, but suddenly, faced with the startling prospect of eviction from the place that has been their home for generations, they feel almost defenceless. Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Steps in Darkness* (1962) is the image of childhood as it wakes up from innocence to the crude realities and sordid cruelties of life among grown up people. Little Beero's world widens as he moves from his parental hut to the school with its atmosphere of sadism, to the huts of his fellow-pupils, and to the playground; and all the while, it is but taking steps in darkness, not moving into a world of light and joy.

It was mentioned earlier that, since Bankim's time, the *sannyasi* (in one or another guise) has often figured in Indian fiction. In Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo the bogus 'Swami' takes advantage of human gullibility so as to be even with the 'Pillars of Society' who had given a raw deal to him and to his daughter in the days of the Bengal famine. In R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Raju is a 'Swami' by mistake, and in the end we wonder whether the lie has not really become the truth. In Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire and Possession*, the Swamy is a faith-healer, a magnet to many, a witness-spirit, a sheet-anchor; but now and then people ask themselves whether he isn't really a charlatan! In Anand Lall's *Seasons of Jupiter*, the hero Rai Gyan Chand consorts with a Sadhu and experiments with asceticism for a time before returning to his old way of life. Sometimes the Swamy or Sadhu has no more than a decorative role; he is there because Western readers look for him in novels on India! Pure sanctity is as difficult to realize in a novel as pure villainy, for the web of human character is seldom all white or all dark. Some novelists have, by a sheer effort of the imagination, tried to bring to life the hoary Rishis of old. In Sri Devudu's Kannada novel, *Mahabrahmana*, there is an attempt at the imaginative

reconstruction of the life and times of Rishi Vishvamitra, the author of the *gayatri*, the holiest and hoariest of *mantras*. In K. M. Munshi's epic novel, *Bhagwan Parashurama*, there is a magnificent re-creation of the Vedic and Epic ages, and Rishis like Vishvamitra and Vasishta, and a multitude of other characters come back to life, and re-enact the heroic events of old. In the latter part of the novel, the issue is joined between the 'mighty opposites', Sahasrarjuna and Parashurama, and the latter fulfils his role as avatar of Vishnu by destroying the former, the scourge of his times.

The Indian novelist is not usually attracted to new techniques in plotting, narration or characterization. As a rule, descriptions of sex life used to be prudish, but the writing is less inhibited in novels published in recent years. There are passages in novels like *Possession*, *A Bend in the Ganges* and Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* that would not have figured in the writing of an Indian novelist in the thirties. Norms are changing everywhere, and they are changing in India too. The 'stream of consciousness' method of narration, again, is but rarely tried by the Indian novelist. There is, of course, G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), a novel that stands apart. Two women novelists, Shakuntala Shrinagesh in her *The Little Black Box* (1955) and Anita Desai in her *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965), have also made intelligent use of the method. In other ways, of course, guarded experimentation is going on: zig-zag in narration jumbling the past, present and future to charge the novel with suspense and piquancy, characterization on the basis of purposeful inconsistency (human nature is 'broad', after all, as Dostoevsky used to say), and a functionally experimental prose style.

This whirl of names and titles and dates and types, although it might tend to blur the picture, must at least show that the Novel in India—and the Indo-Anglian Novel, which in many ways merges with the totality—is a rich enough and variegated enough phenomenon. We have detective novels like S. K. Chettur's *Bombay Murder* and Kamala Sathianadhan's *Detective Janaki*, fantasies like Purushottam Tricamdas's *The Living Mask* and the novels of Sudhin N. Ghose, philosophical novels like Dilip Kumar Roy's *The Upward Spiral* and Raja Rao's

The Serpent and the Rope and *The Cat and Shakespeare*, and novels of school life like Narayan's *Swami and Friends* and Muriel Wasi's *Too High for Rivalry*. Not a colour or shade of colour in the spectrum is wanting. Numberless novels are published, and they are clearly of unequal quality. But the best novels—they are not many, but there are some—are very good indeed. It is true there has occurred no Tolstoy yet, no Dostoevsky, but they will come too; for, always, we needs must hope that the best is yet to be! We shall now turn to the more important novelists, one by one.

Mulk Raj Anand

Of the Indo-Anglian novelists, only Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan have shown anything like stamina and stern consistency of purpose. There has been no dearth of talent: but it has been generally content to throw up a stray novel or two—as if they were no more than the byproducts of an activity directed to quite other ends like law, teaching, politics, civil service, journalism—and one has had to wait for years (and often in vain) for a repetition of the feat. But Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan have managed (not minding the difficulties they have had to face) to hold on to the chosen course, and each has now to his credit a corpus of creative fiction of sufficient bulk and quality to merit serious study. And there is this further advantage: Anand and Narayan also challenge a comparative study of their aims, methods and achievements. Roughly contemporaneous, Anand hails from India's (or what, before the Partition of 1947, used to be India's) North-Western frontier, and Narayan from almost the Southern end of the peninsula. Between them they comprise as it were the North and the South, extension and concentration, vigour and urbanity, vitality and artistic reticence.

Mulk Raj Anand's father was a traditional coppersmith who turned to the army for a living, while his mother came of sturdy peasant stock. The traditional Indian coppersmith is a clever and resourceful craftsman, and his profession demands the use of both brawn and brain, and he needs for the exercise of his art patience as well as an eye for beauty wedded to utility. But with the advance of modern science and technology, and the invasion of mass-produced articles, the traditional village craftsmen are fast losing their occupations, and are obliged to migrate to the city to obtain regular employment, and even to brave the perils of army life as an adventurous and lucrative career. The

craftsman's industry and meticulous attention to detail and the army man's dare-devilry and feeling for adventure are among the major constituents of Mulk Raj Anand's heritage from his father. From his peasant mother he doubtless derived his commonsense, his sense of the ache at the heart of Indian humanity, and his understanding compassion for the waifs, the disinherited, the lowly, the lost—in a word *Daridra-Narayana* (the Lord as incarnate Poverty), the one visible godhead omnipresent in the Indian subcontinent.* Born at Peshawar in 1905, Mulk Raj Anand had his education at Lahore, London and Cambridge, and took a Doctorate in Philosophy. With such academic attainments, the normal thing would have been for him to accept a Professorship in a Government College or University, and end up in due course as a zone dictator of Higher Learning Unlimited. But Anand chose instead the hazardous profession of letters. One of his early books was *Curries and Other Indian Dishes*; after all, as Norman Douglas once remarked, the curry is India's greatest contribution to civilization! Other early books were *Persian Painting*, *The Hindu View of Art*, and *The Golden Breath* (1933)—the last being an introduction to the work of Tagore, Iqbal, Puran Singh, Sarojini Naidu and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. Then came the novels, in quick succession. Anand had thus early found his voice and vocation.

The nineteen thirties were the seed-time of modern independent India: the Gandhian salt satyagraha movements of 1930 and 1932, the three Round Table Conferences, the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935, the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, the Gandhian movements for Harijan uplift and Basic Education, the organization of Marxist parties of diverse hues (the Congress Socialists, the Royists, the Communists), the involvement in the War in 1939, the schism in the Congress leading to the expulsion of Subhas Chandra Bose and his eventual escape to Germany and Japan—it was a packed decade indeed. Although normally resident in England,

* Cf. Somerset Maugham in his *Notebook*: "It wasn't the Taj Mahal, the *ghats* of Benares, the temple at Madura or the mountains of Travancore that had moved me; it was the peasant, terribly emaciated, with nothing to cover his nakedness but a rag round the middle.... That was the sight that had given me the most poignant emotion in India."

Anand too could not but respond to the impact of events in India. With him, however, as with Bankim Chandra before him, political action took the form of writing novels. He wrote of the people, for the people, and as a man of the people. It may be said that these early novels reveal an aim and a sense of direction much as an avalanche or a flood shows a fury of momentum, a surge of force, a heady rush towards the goal. Evidently a novelist in a hurry who must say all that he has to say as quickly, and as effectively, as he can.

The first five novels appeared in the following sequence: *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939) and *Across the Black Waters* (1940). He was meantime, as was natural, associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement in India; and after the War, he finally returned to India and settled down in Bombay. During the last twenty or more years he has been editing *Marg*, a high-class journal devoted to the Arts, and one of the best of its kind anywhere. More recently, he has published a standard treatise on Hindu erotic art. The Leftist 'Peace' Movements have found an ardent supporter in him, though it must be conceded that politics claims but a part, a small part, not the whole, of his life. Owing to these preoccupations, Anand the writer of fiction has necessarily receded a little into the background. There are, however, several novels and collections of short stories: *The Sword and the Sicklc*, *The Barber's Trade Union*, *The Big Heart*, *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess*, *Seven Summers*, *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, and *Morning Face*. Some of the old power of creation, the old energy of narration and the old talent for projecting character and situation survives still; and when his seven-volume autobiographical novel is completed, it must prove a colossus indeed in modern fiction.

In his special Preface to the second Indian edition of *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1951), Anand has given us a hint of this early fire and drive behind his first novels. In writing of the pariahs and the bottom dogs rather than of the elect and the sophisticated, he had ventured into territory that had been largely ignored till then by Indian writers. For all their nationalistic fervour, Bankim Chandra's novels were but romances dis-

tantly imitative of Scott, with a historical or mystical slant; Tagore was chiefly interested in the upper and middle classes, and Sarat Chandra in the lower middle classes; and Munshi Premchand chose his themes from the peasantry and humble folk of Uttar Pradesh. None of them cared to produce realistic or naturalistic fiction after the manner of a Balzac or a Zola. It was Anand's aim to stray lower still than even Sarat Chandra or Premchand, to show to the West that there was more in the Orient than could be inferred from Omar Khayyam, Li Po, Tagore or Kipling; and so he described a waif like Munoo in *Coolie*, an untouchable like Bakha, an indentured labourer like Gangu, and set them right at the centre of the scheme of cruelty and exploitation that held India in its vicious grip. Although born in one of the higher castes, his father, Lall Chand Anand, served in the Indian Army rising to be a Subedar; and Mulk Raj as a child had mixed freely with the children of the sweepers attached to his father's regiment, and such associations cutting across caste divisions had continued during his boyhood and youth. These early playmates and friends became, with the necessary imaginative idealization and transformation, the heroes of his first novels. As Anand himself acknowledges in the Preface referred to, already:

All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood, when I began to interpret their lives in my writing. They were not mere phantoms....They were flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of his life.

Thus, when Anand started writing fiction,¹ he decided he would prefer the familiar to the fancied, that he would avoid the highways of romance and sophistication but explore the bylanes of the outcastes and the peasants, the sepoy and the working

¹ The 'source books' of Anand's novels and stories were really drafted in 1926, and are now being published in seven volumes, the first two being *Seven Summers* and *Morning Face* (1968).

people. It was, however, no laborious exercise of self-conscious proletarianism. To Anand it was merely the easier and more natural way; he was himself of the proletariat, if you will, and he wrote in a brisk unselfconscious way about what he had seen at first hand in the years of his childhood, boyhood and youth. It is the atmosphere of the late twenties and the early thirties, the air was filled with the dust of politics and infected with the fumes of man's inhumanity to man, but it was not altogether unrelieved by hope.

It is not as though Anand the novelist is necessarily in shackles to the political evangelist, the advocate of the down-trodden and the underprivileged. Anand was a student of poetry, of the Arts, and of philosophy before he turned to political action through creative fiction. Besides, he had first seen his heroes as pieces of trembling humanity and loved them before he sought to put them into his books. The exploiter, of course, was a different matter; but even there hatred was often softened—though not always—by a sense of the absurd, and anger by a feeling of pity. The exploiter is a fool no less than a knave, more fool than knave, perhaps, because all knavery is, after all, a form of folly. In spite of it all, the first three novels, as they appeared, were like so many packets of dynamite: they enraged the diehard, they ruffled the bureaucracy. One of them, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, had to be withdrawn from circulation in England on the threat of prosecution as an obscene book. All three were banned by the Government of India. During Anand's occasional visits to India, he was pestered by the attentions of the C.I.D., and 'Bolshevik!' was hurled at him, as if it explained the explosive contents of his novels. The novels were 'explosive' only because truth is explosive at times, and the open expression of the truth can be an incitement and a rebellion. Probing the hidden nucleus of exploitation, Anand released chain reactions of terrific urgency. And for a time he came to be identified in literature with the same spirit that in politics, in the person of Jawaharlal Nehru, had thundered in 1929 at the Lahore Congress: Long live the Revolution!

Of all his novels, *Untouchable*² is the most compact and

² Anand has described in 'The Story of My Experiments with a White

artistically satisfying, *Coolie* is the most extensive in space and time, evoking variegated action and multiplicity in character, while *Two Leaves and a Bud* is the most effective as a piece of implied indictment. *Untouchable* is, further, the shortest of the novels, and the most revealing and rewarding of the lot. The 'unities' are admirably preserved, as in a classical play, for *Untouchable* covers the events of a single day in the life of the 'low-caste' boy, Bakha, in the town of Bulashah. The 18-year old boy is one of the sons of Lakha, the Jemadar of the sweepers of the town and cantonment. Bakha is a child of the twentieth century, and the impact of new influences causes stirrings within him. From a Tommy he has secured a pair of old breeches, and from a sepoy a pair of old boots; he would, if he could, like to look like the white foreigner and so be in the 'fasshun'. But as the day dawns, his work of latrine-cleaning also begins; and his dreams notwithstanding, he is a steady and efficient worker: "Each muscle of his body, hard as rock when it came to play, seemed to shine forth like glass... 'What a dexterous workman!' the onlooker would have said. And though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean". Anand describes Bakha's morning round of duties with a painstaking particularity, bringing out both the efficiency with which the boy does this essential service and the callousness with which the beneficiaries receive it as if it is a matter of no account whatsoever. Three rows of latrines to clean single-handed, and several times too; to bring cleanliness in the place of filth and possible disease: such is Bakha's daily toil which he turns into a dexterous art. His sister, Sohini, is also dexterous after her fashion:

How a round base can be adjusted on a round top, how a sphere can rest on a sphere is a problem which may be of interest to those who think like Euclid or Archimedes. It never occurred to Sohini to ask herself anything like this as she balanced her pitcher on her head and went to and from her one-roomed home to the steps of the caste-well where she counted on the chance of some gentleman taking pity on her and giving her the water she needed.

Here in a couple of sentences Anand has fused wonder, appreciation' how he happened to write and publish *Untouchable* (*Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*).

ciation and anger. Sohini approaches the well, and is involved in inter-caste abuses and recriminations, for there are degrees of caste among the 'low-caste' people, there being none low without one being lower still! But no water yet, till at last the priest, Kali Nath, more as a cure for constipation than in an access of generosity, agrees to draw water from the well for the assembled outcastes. Having drawn a pail with considerable difficulty, he sees Sohini, feels attracted to her youthfulness, and driving away the others, pours the water into her pot and suggests that she should come to his house later in the day to clean the courtyard. When she does go, he makes improper suggestions to her, and as she starts screaming, he shouts 'polluted' and gathers a crowd of indignant high-caste people. Meantime, Bakha also comes upon the scene, having deputized for his father and swept the streets. He is understandably furious that insult should be added to injury, and sending away Sohini, tries himself to collect bits of bread at the houses of the well-to-do. In this he is much less successful than Sohini usually is, and he returns home and bitterly tells his father: "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt". Lakha tells the story of Baghwan Das, the Hakim, who once cured Bakha of a serious ailment; belonging to an older generation, he is apt to accept the law of untouchability with less resentment than Bakha. But, for the latter, it is a curse that has to be fought and destroyed.

In the afternoon, Bakha 'attends' the marriage of his friend Ram Charan's sister—the girl of a higher caste whom he couldn't marry. Ram Charan the washerman's son, Chota the leather-worker's son, and Bakha forget for the nonce the minutiae of sub-low-caste differences, and share the sugar-plums, and plan to play hockey in the evening. At Havildar Charat Singh's, again, caste is forgotten: the Havildar treats Bakha affectionately and gives him a new hockey stick. Playing hockey against the 31st Punjabis, Bakha sends a goal, which starts a free fight. A little boy is injured, and trying to lift him up, Bakha 'pollutes' him according to the boy's irate mother. When he returns home at last, his father roundly rates him for idling away all the afternoon, and drives him out of the house. Bakha's cup of frustration and misery is full.

That really should be the end of the story. The problem of caste and poverty, squalor and backwardness, ignorance and superstition, admits of no easy solution. Almost 36 years after Anand's novel was written (1935), and 24 years after independence, the problem—with blunted edges, perhaps, and also with some relieving features here and there—still defies a firm and final solution. As a kind of epilogue (it is not *called* such, though), Anand offers three solutions to Bakha's agony of self-abasement and total frustration. There is, firstly, Colonel Hutchinson, the Salvationist, who asks Bakha to turn Christian and so end his caste. There is Mahatma Gandhi who, addressing a public meeting which Bakha attends, says: "I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism". If he is to be born again, he would prefer to be born an outcaste, rather than as a member of one of the so-called higher castes. The 'untouchable' was really the *harijan*, 'man of God'. It was Satanic to think that anybody was 'polluted' or could 'pollute' another. And so on. This is vastly encouraging, if also disturbing, to Bakha. But he makes, before the evening wears out, a third encounter also: this time, the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar. He says simply that, when the scavengers change their profession, they will end their caste; and a modern sanitary system—the flush—will bring about this revolution. "Then the sweepers can be free", the poet concludes, "from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society". Bakha is duly impressed, feels more hopeful of the future than at any time since the day dawned, and returns to his house to tell his father about the Mahatma and about the machine that will "clear dung without anyone having to handle it". Defending this epilogue in his Foreword to the book, E. M. Forster rightly says: "It is the necessary climax, and it has mounted up with triple effect. Bakha returns to his father and his wretched bed, thinking now of the Mahatma, now of the Machine. His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand".

Bakha is only partly the prototypical 'untouchable', for he is also himself, a unique individual, even in some measure an

exceptional 'untouchable'. The many things that happen to him in the novel could have happened,—perhaps they still happen somewhere or other even today. Only the dramatic telescoping—the juxtaposition, the linking up, of so many events in the course of hardly more than twelve hours—is Anand's. There is no doubt that he has drawn upon what he had seen and heard as a boy, for there is a photographic fidelity about the picture that convinces at once, though it also overwhelms us by its cumulative ferocity and force of detail. Life in the town and cantonment—the colours and the smells—the chants and the noises—the filth and the cruelty—the kindness and the humanity—the shifting scenes in the temple, the market-place, the playground—the quiet of the hillside—the stir at public meetings: all are evoked with an uncanny accuracy so that *Untouchable* strikes us as the picture of a place, of a society, and of certain persons not easily to be forgotten: a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy. As a novelist addressing himself to the task of exposing certain evils, Anand (it must be conceded) has been as effective almost as Dickens himself.³

Coolie is about twice as long as *Untouchable*, and the action is spread over some years and moves from village to town, from town to city, and from city to Bombay, the Gateway of India, and from Bombay to Simla, India's summer capital. *Coolie* is what Edwin Muir would call a 'character' novel, for it extends primarily in space: with the hero, the hill-boy Munoo, we move too, and follow his fortunes or rather misfortunes first with his uncle and aunt in his village, Bilasapur; then with the Bank Sub-Accountant's family at Sham Nagar, where Munoo works as a servant; then with Munoo's benefactor, Prabha, and his wife in the incredible Cat Killers' Lane in the old feudal city, Daulatpur; we are presently lost with Munoo in Bombay's slums and chawls and noise and madness and general filth and oases of splendour; and, lastly, with Mrs. Mainwaring at Simla, as her page and rikshaw-puller, where he dies of consumption. The pace of the writing, as in *Untouchable*, is swift, and the

³ In his Preface to the book, E. M. Forster wrote: "...the book seems to me indescribably clean...it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it".

scenes follow in quick succession. If *Untouchable* is the microcosm, *Coolie* is more like the macrocosm that is Indian society: concentration gives place to diffusion and comprehension, with several foci of concentration. *Coolie* is verily a cross-section of India, the visible India, that mixture of the horrible and the holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful. The general effect is panoramic, good and evil being thrown together as in actual life; there is no time for us to pause, to think, to judge, for we are constantly shifted, a new situation engulfs us at every turn, and new cruelties and absurdities whirl round us. Village, Taluka headquarters, District headquarters, Presidency capital, the national (summer) capital—this is a progression indeed, but only spatially, for the human situation hardly alters wherever we may be. Munoo is the exploited all the time, one way or the other, by one person or another; and his fate is typical of the fate of millions whose only distinguishing badge is patient sufferance. Like 'untouchable', 'coolie' too has been—and still is—a term of derogation in India and elsewhere. India's surplus population has for over a century overflowed in various directions, and there are Indian 'coolies' in Africa, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, and many other countries; while the coolie's services are welcome, he is himself at best merely tolerated. Inside India too there are those who have no property, no education, no lucrative profession, and these drift into the nondescript vocation of the 'coolie'. Anand decided that he would humanize the 'coolie'—as in *Bakha* he humanized the 'untouchable'—and give him feelings, a mind, a heart, a soul, and raise his dignity as a trembling piece of flesh and blood, worthy of commemoration in serious literature. Usually the coolie is just taken for granted, as if he were but a shadow, a cheap and useful machine, an uncomplaining target for abuses and indignities. But Anand would rather ask: "Hath not a Coolie eyes? Hath not a Coolie hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, cooled and warmed by the same winter and summer as anybody else is"? The coolie too is—or could be—the "paragon of animals"! But prejudice has hardened into a custom, and is held up as a natural law. Children

can rise above it, saints can rise above it; but average humanity is still a bundle of selfishness and prejudice, and is often capable of sadistic cruelty. Anand's *Coolie* carries no specific indictment of individuals: the indictment is against society as a whole—a society that breeds such prejudice and cupidity and cruelty.

In *Untouchable* the evil is isolated as caste: in *Coolie* the evil is more widespread, and appears as greed, selfishness and inhumanity in their hundred different forms. Yet the root of the matter is poverty: as Munoo realizes, "all servants look alike. There must be only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor". And poverty is diffused all over India, and like a poison infects all our society and renders it unsocial and inhuman. An orphan, Munoo finds his life with his uncle and aunt loveless enough: but when he is translated to Babu Nathoo Ram's house at Sham Nagar and as he faces the formidable Bibiji, his heart sinks: "And, in his heart, there was a lonely song, a melancholy wail, asking, not pointedly, but in a vague, uncertain rhythm, what life in this woman's house would prove". It actually proves to be a sort of madhouse, and people are cruel because they cannot be happy. Only the Chota Babu is kind, for his own disposition is to be happy and give happiness. A crisis soon comes, and Munoo escapes from this prison, and seeks temporary refuge in a train. He is discovered lying under the bunk by a passenger, Prabha, who takes him to Daulatpur. As he approaches the Cat Killers' Lane, Munoo experiences the flutter of excitement, "the fear of the unknown in his bowels and the stirring of hope for a better life in the new world he was entering". The characters and the kaleidoscopic patterns of developing action in the Cat Killers' Lane have quite a Dickensian piquancy of realism. There is, for instance, the inimitable Sir Todar Mal, "dressed in a black alpaca frock-coat, tight white cotton pyjamas and a great heap of a white turban on his long black face", and there is Lady Todar Mal who might also be called Lady Fish-Wife, so stentorian is her voice and so aggressive are her curses. In this cavernous world of the Cat Killers' Lane (surely one of the circles in Hell that Dante knew nothing about), tensions develop quickly, there are volleys of abuses, and humanity endlessly enacts its petty dramas of sadism and cruelty. Unfortunately for

Munoo, his benefactor becomes bankrupt as a result of sharp practice by his partner, and has to leave Daulatpur for good. Munoo now becomes a coolie in the grain market and a porter at the station. People like him are as straws in the wind, and they can realize themselves only "through the force of external necessity, in the varied succession of irrelevant and unconnected circumstances". He has seen domestic service, service in a pickle factory, service as a coolie and porter, and even discipleship for an hour under a lecherous 'Yogi'. By accident he makes the acquaintance of an elephant-trainer in a circus, and with his help reaches Bombay. He is, however, duly warned: "The bigger a city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam. You have to pay even for the breath that you breathe. But you are a brave lad".

Munoo's misadventures in Bombay from another Book in this prose epic of modern India. Good and evil are thrown together higgledy-piggledy, and more often than not it is evil that gains the upper hand. Life on the pavements or in the slums, service in the Sir George White Cotton Mills, collision with human sharks and hyenas, the friendship of Hari and Lakshami, the companionship of Ratan, the descent into the Red Lights district, involvement in the 'labour trouble' and the Hindu-Muslim disturbances,—Munoo experiences them all, and as he runs up Malabar Hill to escape the hectic police action, he is knocked down by a car. Its owner, Mrs. Mainwaring, decides to take Munoo with her to Simla. She is a woman of vast pretensions and no morals, and makes Munoo her rikshaw-puller and page (and perhaps something more as well); and worn out by work, he hastens to his grave, "the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps". Like Lakshami, Mother India receives Munoo to her bosom with the words: "We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering! My love!"

Reviewing *Coolie* on its first appearance, the *Spectator* said: "Munoo is a universal kind of figure". He is a sturdy hill-boy, with a taste for the joy of life which is denied to him again and again:

And again he reached out to life, the joy of life which registered in his mind's eye the clear hieroglyphs of numerous desires: 'I want to

live, I want to know, I want to work, to work this machine', he said; 'I shall grow up and be a man, a strong man like the wrestler . . .'

Till the last he feels that he is *not* going to die. Munoo is not one boy but three or four linked together as if the same soul achieved transmigration from body to body; he is necessarily passive,—things just happen to him,—but at least he is a sensitive photographic plate that receives impressions correctly and preserves them. Apart from Munoo himself, the novel is peopled with scores of characters, the scenes change, the situations alter, white jostles with black, and both are often covered by a dull grey: but all is seen through Munoo's awakening and ripening consciousness. His robust health, his thirst for life, his essentially unspoilt nature, his readiness to respond to kindness, his puzzlement that good and evil should be so inextricably mixed up, all make him a true cousin-brother to Bakha, who are both heirs to the scalding frustration that is the only birthright for millions born under the Indian Sun. Anand's capacity to evoke divers places, persons, moods, scenes, and situations is as uncanny as it is unlaborious, and few novels of modern India can excel its sheer amplitude and power of narration.

If *Untouchable*, since it explores the impact of caste cruelty on the adolescent mind of Bakha, has a sort of piercing quality that is akin to the lyrical; if *Coolie*, with its enormous range and multiplicity in action and character, has an almost epic quality; then *Two Leaves and a Bud* may be said to be essentially a 'dramatic' novel, and certainly it culminates in a tragic clash of interests and destinies, and what is fine is put out, and what is dark is triumphant. Again we start from a village in North Western India. Munoo's peregrinations cover vast spaces of Northern and Western India; but Gangu crosses India horizontally from a village near Hoshiarpur in the Punjab to the Macpherson Tea Estate in distant Assam. Whereas Bakha and Munoo are mere boys, Gangu is past middle age, and he takes with him his wife, Sajani, and his children, Leila and Buddhu. The Tea Plantation is a world within a world, a world (or a prison) apart; as the coolie Narain tells Gangu:

I suppose it was in our kismet. But at home it was like a prison

and here it is slightly worse....First water, afterwards mire! This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should run ...

Superficially, the foreign exploiters and the masses of the exploited (the coolies) make the main pattern of tension in the novel. But quite a few of the Indians—the 'sardars', the mistris, the 'babus', the warders—are exploiters too, and between them create "an atmosphere of twisting and turning" for the coolies. On the other hand, there are also the 'good', idealistic Britishers, people like Dr. John de la Havre, whose consciousness is seeped with the agonizing memories of yesterday and the stinging woes of today. He asks himself impatiently: "Yes, why not let the natives run their own show? It is their country and we have really no right to it". Or he jots down notes like:

Why didn't it occur to anyone—the simple obvious thing that people don't need to read Marx to realize here? The black coolies clear the forests, plant the fields, toil and garner the harvest, while all the money-grabbing, slave-driving, soulless managers and directors draw their salaries and dividends and build up monopolies ...

There is Croft-Cooke the boss of the plantation, and his reasonably contented wife; there is their daughter, Barbara, who is in love with de la Havre; but what chance has their romance in the atmosphere of the Tea-Estates Club, where the white people meet, and talk airily, foolishly or callously, generating hate and abetting cruelty? The villain of the novel, of course, is Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager, who is sheer evil, compounded of cruelty and lust.

Soon after his arrival, Gangu realizes that he has unwittingly walked into a trap; he asks himself: "Did all the sahibs who come to own this land get their labourers by letting lies pass for truth, did they make deceit a virtue and exalt the worst to the best, make every pushful duffer like Buta into a sardar, and liberate all the selfishness that any charlatan could use for his own purpose"? The Seth who buys cheap from the Tibetan producers of grain and sells dear to the coolies provokes Gangu to a sudden fury of introspection:

Gangu looked across them through the dark layers of his own bitterness, and tried to penetrate into the fastnesses of their minds, and beyond them to the villages, where the tense insistence of their loins had driven the plough deep, deep, into the earth, where they had sprinkled the seed and waited for the rain from heaven to irrigate their furrows, where they had watched the opening of the buds and gazed at the flowering of the crop into fruit, with smiles broad as the rays of the Himalayan sun. He knew the meaning of their toil, he had known the beauty of that magic which was in the hard-yielding earth, he knew the love with which men spent themselves so that they could reap the fruit at the end, he knew the agony of having to part with that fruit, and the disillusion consequent upon selling it or bartering it to a hard, un-understanding, small-hearted, mean bania or city-broker. He yearned towards the Tibetans, and bursting with indignation and remorse at their suffering, and his own, wallowed in the welter of a music that made him dumb with its turbulence.

Presently malaria breaks out, and Sajani dies; for Gangu, as for the other coolies, plantation life is but a progression from today's 'bad' to the 'worse' of tomorrow. Precarious 'peace' as prevails in the plantation is always at the mercy of an accident. Discontent gathers volume like a boil, and a chance collision makes it burst. Two loose women quarrel, Reggie behaves like a brute, and some coolies are injured. An appeal is made to Croft-Cooke without avail. The coolies decide to demonstrate, and the plantation splits into two camps, with a few dissidents in both of them. Aerial help is rushed to the planters, and the coolie demonstrators are brought to their senses with a due show of force. Dr. de la Havre, on account of his pronounced sympathies with the coolies, is summarily dismissed, his romance with Barbara comes abruptly to an end, and he leaves the scene for good. 'Normalcy' returns. A tiger-shoot is stage-managed (as such things are done even today!) for the greater glory of a visiting Governor. But Reggie still feels a smouldering discontent within. He is hated by the coolies, and more or less cold-shouldered by the white community. In a mad accession of lust he approaches Leila, as she is leisurely plucking the tea leaves alone; as she runs away, he follows her to her house. There, mad with lust and maddened by frustration and fear, he shoots blindly in front of him, kills Gangu, and beats a hasty retreat as if Death itself is hot on his heels. A trial follows,

and Mr. Justice Mowberley, concurring with the majority view of a jury consisting of seven Europeans and two Indians, finds Reggie 'not guilty' of the charges of murder and culpable homicide and discharges him.

Two Leaves and a Bud—for all its violence and bitterness—has a very jewel of a title, inspired by the coolies' song:

I will make a good sheaf
Plucking, plucking, plucking
Two leaves and a bud
Two leaves and a bud.

The characterization is angular and sharp—Reggie and de la Havre are two extremes—and the pointedness of the indictment of an inhuman system blurs the lines of humanity in the picture. There are unforgettable scenes, no doubt,—and one of them is Leila's lone struggle with the python that has circled her in its deadly clasp:

Through the gathering force of the snake's coils round her body, she felt her right hand hang limply by her side. She raised it from the forearm with a sudden deliberation and pressed the scythe upwards. The sharp blade of the instrument bruised the python and it tightened its grasp on her.

The feel of a drop of warm blood which fell on her bare toe urged her to saw. The rotund snake wriggled and almost crushed her ribs.

A last, involuntary, desperate stroke of her hand miraculously cut its body into two.

She struggled out of the coils of the horror with a fierce force, and ran to the place where she had put her bundle of sticks...

But the logic, the intellectual framework of the novel triumphs over the human content. It is obvious that there is something of Forster's *A Passage to India* in Anand's book: the atmosphere of suspicion and strife, the racial intolerance and antagonism, the small talk in the Club, the reign of prejudice and unreason. It is clear, too, that in portraying Reggie and the other very unpleasant characters, Anand's writing is infiltrated with disgust and hate. The artist is for the moment held down by the Angry Young Man. "I realize", Anand said some fifteen years after writing the novel, "that the catharsis of a book lies

ultimately in the pity, the compassion and understanding of an artist and not in his partiality". Yet Anand had to tell this unvarnished tale of plantation life in the thirties, even as Dickens had to tell the truth about certain unsavoury aspects of Victorian life.

In his next batch of three novels, Anand traces the career of Lalu Singh over a period of some years, from shortly before the first World War to the disturbed post-war era in India—the Gandhian Age. Thus boyhood, youth and early manhood are the themes of the trilogy, *Village*, *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle*. Lalu Singh is first introduced as the youngest of a Sikh farmer's sons. The atmosphere of the village, Nandpur, is vividly evoked—and Nandpur, in its main outlines, is like any other village in India. The typical ingredients of village life—landlord and *savkar*, *sarkar* and mumbo-jumbo, convention and superstition, mass conformity and mass hysteria, the cupidity and cruelty of some and the apathy and helplessness of the many—inevitably conspire to daunt and all but crush the free and ardent spirit of Lalu Singh. At every turn he is seized with discomfiture, and the agony and the anger seem to be in vain. His heart beats in response to the primordial life of the village, but his mind incessantly rebels and yearns for the dim, distant, alluring horizons. Visiting a neighbouring town to see a fair in progress, Lalu has a variety of experiences, the climactic being a visit to the *King George Vth Haircutting and Shaving Saloon*, where he gets his *kaishas* (the visible insignia of Sikhism) shorn away in a rebellious impulse. This causes a commotion at home, and his father feels that the family has been disgraced by this impious act. The people of the village go one better even, and wish to parade him with his blackened face on a donkey's back; but Lalu fights them all, and manages to wriggle out of the situation with but a few bruises on his body. There is a sudden downpour: Can it be that God too is angry—or, may be, He is only angry with Lalu's persecutors! To make up for this humiliation, Lalu finds favour by accident in the eyes of the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Hercules Long (a 'Hercules' only in name, for a tame buffalo like 'Suchi' causes him fright and sends him up a tree!), and this brings about his rehabilitation. But another mischance

overtakes him, this time the attentions of the spiteful landlord, Harbans Singh. Lalu loves his village, but these explosions of prejudice and hatred make him want to leave his village for good. In despair as much as in relief he enlists as a sepoy, and soon finds kinship with other sepoys. In the village, however, there are sudden developments: Lalu's brother, Sharm Singh, murders the landlord's son in jealousy and revenge, and is hanged; and old Nihal Singh the father is heartbroken. Lalu is with his afflicted parents for a while, but he has presently to join his regiment and make the trip across the black waters to fight alongside of the British soldiers against the armies of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Shortly before sailing from Karachi, Lalu hears that his father has passed away, but his new-found friends help him to bear the shock.

In the second novel of the trilogy, Lalu's experiences in France from the moment of his arrival in Marseilles to the time of his capture by the enemy are detailed with a suggestive and selective art. There is, in the background, the conflict between the Allies and the Central Powers, whose meaning Lalu and his friends cannot fully comprehend. But within the British army also there are the divisions—the sahibs on the one hand and the sepoys on the other, the Angrezi and the Indians—which are sometimes ignored and sometimes cannot be. Even the sepoys are not—how can they be!—all of a piece. There are the upright men straight as a die, and there are the sneaks, the shirkers, the twisters. Lalu has his friends—Dhanoo, Lachman, Uncle Kirpu; and he has his enemies too. Thus Anand manages in his narrative to make Lalu the centre of the action, although he is but one of several millions caught in the maelstrom of the war. The early period of orientation and acclimatization: the first uncertain engagements: the oasis of the French farm, where Lalu makes friends with the boy André and his sister Marie: the loss of his friends one by one (death by water, death on the battlefield, death through suicide): the failure of Lalu's enemies to thwart and ruin him: the petering out of the attack and his own capture by a lion-moustached German... all is narrated in natural sequence, and what the war means to Lalu, what it means to average humanity, is sketched with convincing detail. Always, during the war, Lalu is but what

he has been in his village, and what he will be should he ever survive the war and return to his country:

In him the two poles of nature seemed always to have been quarrelling, as if he had not decided whether to burst out of his skin, as it were, and live outside himself, or to recline back, self-exiled, pain-marred, mutilated with the memories of those hindrances which the world had put in front of him. The two anti-types had revolved in a furious whirl of the axle tree during his boyhood. He was the contradiction who had cultivated a pride in excess of a dignity, even as he had gone carelessly about, playing pranks with the boys of his village and laughing at the greybeards, bent on the consummation of his unrestrained impulses, as if he could cheat nature and take happiness by surprise.

This is the key to Lalu's character, the key too to the understanding of the entire trilogy. But apart from an occasional passage of acute introspection like the above, the main narrative, with its burden of incident, comedy and tragedy, moves with a certain precipitation, and the reader can sniff in these pages the atmosphere of war-torn France in 1914-18. The general mood of the Indian sepoys is one of fascination and bewilderment; why should the Europeans, who are obviously such superior people, go about killing one another, making a large graveyard of a fair country like France? Lalu almost feels that "the whole of this fighting and devastation was accidental, the fault of some general who had given the wrong orders, that if only the general's superiors knew they would call off the war"!

While the war is still raging and Lalu is free, he writes to his mother, outlining his future plans. He will return and redeem the mortgaged family property. But back in India, he is involved in the politics of the twenties, for with his temperament he cannot be unresponsive to the challenges of the time. He engages in political action, and reaps the consequences. Government against the people, the people themselves cut up into divisions, the play of political and personal rivalries, the clash of ideologies, the pull of selfish greed and the pull of idealism and the need for sacrifice—these ingredients of a revolutionary situation are the content of *The Sword and the Sickle*. But it is through the shocks of the developing political situation that Lalu graduates into manhood and maturity. The Lalu trilogy, although it lacks

the concentrated power of *Untouchable*, the vast comprehension of *Coolie*, or the propagandist edge of *Two Leaves and a Bud*, is an impressive work nevertheless, taking within its purview the poles of an Indian village and a French farm, comprising local and national politics, and embracing by implication a global war.

The Big Heart (1945) reproduces the terrific intensity and concentration of *Untouchable*. The issue here is not between the 'untouchables' and the 'higher' castes, but between the *thathiars* (the hereditary coppersmiths) and the capitalists (Lalla Murli Dhar and Seth Gokal Chand). The factory set up by the latter throws the coppersmiths out of employment—a situation that recalls that of Hauptmann's *The Weavers* and Ernst Toller's *The Machine-Wreckers*. Actually the epigraph in *The Big Heart* is taken from Byron's speech on the Luddites (the Nottinghamshire weavers) in the House of Lords, on 27 February 1812, which figures in Toller's play too. The situation in Amritsar, already explosive, receives the necessary ignition when Ananta the man with the 'big heart' returns from Bombay, having participated in the Gandhian struggle for freedom. Ananta has full faith in the machine, and he sings the refrain:

This is the machine age, sons,
This is the machine age.
We are the men who will master it.

A single day's events are chronicled in the novel, but the tempo increases steadily hour by hour, and sparks fly in the air and there is rumbling thunder in the confabulations and speeches. Ananta's relations with his 'keep' Janki ("consumed by this insidious tuberculosis") provide the element of romance, though one fears all the time that tragedy is round the corner. The climax is reached when one of the workers, Ralia, is possessed by a sudden frenzy and starts smashing the machines in the factory. Ananta, his friend, would stop him if he could: but in the scuffle that follows, Ralia batters Ananta's head against a machine, thereby killing him. The Police Sub-Inspector comes upon the scene, as usual a little too late, and 'order' is restored, and the machine scores over Man. The descriptions in the novel are painstakingly vivid, and the characterization is forceful and

clear. Once again Anand triumphs because he writes of things he knows—things that, as it were, float in the stream of his ancestral memories, things that warm up his blood and course through his veins. And there is a seeming inevitability in the castastrophe recalling, say, O'Neill's *Dynamo* or even a Greek tragedy.

Anand's *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) had a certain topical appeal when it appeared, but it is not Anand quite at his best; his weakness as a novelist and the vices of his style are more obtrusive here than his strength and the virtues of his creative art. Victor, the 'Indian Prince', is one of the six hundred Rajas, Maharajas and Nawabs that Sardar Patel found on his hands in August 1947. But Victor is at once one of the herd in his vices, weaknesses and extravagances, and one of the minority (for example, Junagadh, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Kashmir, Travancore) that wished (if possible) to keep out of the Indian Union, desperately clutching at the phantom,—Independence of both India and Pakistan. As a Prince, Victor has all the vices of pampered royalty—he has wives whom he ignores or ill-treats, he has a mistress, Gangi, who tyrannizes over him, he has his moods and his musings, and he wallows generally in luxury and sloth. Sardar Patel summons him at last to Delhi, keeps him waiting till he loses his nerve, and then it is child's play for him to make Victor sign the Instrument of Accession. But the administration of the State of Shampur continues to be rotten, Victor has fresh troubles, and he goes to the United Kingdom on an enforced holiday. He is soon called back, being in the meanwhile implicated in the murder of a rival in love; returning to India, Victor opportunely becomes mad and enters an Asylum where Anand is content to leave him. The novel is full of small intrigues and the gyrations of sex, and Anand's aim is to fuse contemporary political history with the personal history of a few individuals; but the book rather leaves an impression of cram, like the memory of a nightmare one has been through. Anand doesn't seem to *know* his Victor as he seems to know his Bakha, Munoo and Lalu. Much of the interest and intrigue in the novel is centred in Victor's fatal infatuation for Gangi, and "it was really the call of one chameleon for another, for they had both emerged, with similar temperaments,

from the orbits of their respective affairs and mistaken their fatigue for the urgent need of each other". It is as though they are "prisoners of each other", as though they are constantly feeding and eating and destroying each other; and this maddening abnormality in their relationship is duly reflected, in ever increasing measure, in the abnormality in the condition of affairs in Shampur as well. There is some failure of understanding, and perhaps a failure of compassion as well. In the later novels, *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960) and *The Road* (1961), however, Anand reveals more of his humanity and compassion and less of his disgust and anger with current reality.

But, already, Anand's main preoccupation as a novelist was the resurrection of the long work on which he had started as a young man. It was in 1926 that he wrote this 2000-page autobiographical novel; "a long confession", he calls it, coming from "the compulsion of a morbid obsession" with himself and the people whom he had known. The novel was too huge, and too amorphous, for English publishers to take an interest in it, and so it became the source-book of most of his subsequent novels and short stories. Taking up the "confession" now, he touched it up and published the first part as *Seven Summers* in 1951. Anand's plan is to issue the entire work in seven volumes. The series is to carry the name *Seven Ages of Man* and span a period of about forty years, from 'Bandemataram' to Independence, from the partition of Bengal to the partition of India. In its final shape, *Seven Ages of Man* might conceivably run to 3,500 printed pages, and come to be hailed as one of the longest sustained fictional narratives of all time. The grandeur of conception and the industry and stamina Dr. Anand is bringing to his vocation as a novelist are worthy of all praise.

Seven Summers, as the name indicates, covers the first seven years of the hero-narrator's life. It is Krishan's recapitulation of his own childhood, set in the Punjab of the opening decade of the present century; and Krishan Chander—partly "an incarnation of Krishna of the Yadus" and partly a Punjabi lad—with his liveliness and love of life wins the reader's heart at once. There is something of Krishna and something also of the imp or the spark in all little boys, and in this sense Krishan's story is prototypical of the life of the children of India who

are now in their late fifties or early sixties. Krishan writes that "there was a kind of secret understanding between my mother and myself, for she could enter the fairy world of my imaginings with the naive faith of the peasant woman". She tells him the epic stories of 'gods, demons and others'—especially the story of Krishna and Kamsa—and, "inspired by my mother's stories of gods and goddesses, I was more keen than most boys on that strange spectacle called the *Ras*..." Krishan happily alternates between bouts of illness and seasons of calf love for this or that girl or woman, and in the meantime strays from 'innocence' to the periphery of 'experience'. One of his childhood friends is the sweeper boy, Bakha,—evidently the original of the Bakha of *Untouchable*. The novel ends with the breaking out of the war in 1914, his mother's comment being, "The end of the Kali-yug has come"! As for Krishan himself,

I sensed something of the great events which were impending in the world, but mostly through the myths and legends in which mother wrapped them. For the rest, we stared wide-eyed and uncomprehending at the troop movements and the packing of our own luggage in the strong light of the relentless sun which seemed to be laughing while everyone else was weeping. And our as yet timid, unawakened souls were bent, like our heads, in sadness...

With this begins another chapter in Krishan's life, and the scene shifts to Amritsar, 'City of dreadful Nights'.

The title of the second volume, *Morning Face* (1968), is of course taken from the 'seven ages of man' speech in *As You Like It*:

And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining *morning face*, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

Krishan has now passed from childhood to boyhood, and he does sport his "shining morning face". Like Krishna who was born of one mother but was brought up with love by another, Krishan too has in his beloved, Devaki, a second mother. Anand explained in his 'Dedication' that "the old myth was dormant in my heart and mind; as these myths are inherited by every Indian". The narrative is rather leisurely, and each of the three

Parts—'City of Dreadful Nights', 'The Prison' and 'The Regiment'—is long enough to make a separate novel. From Amritsar to Ludhiana, from Ludhiana to the Jhelum Cantonment, the story moves in the picaresque tradition; and the details of individual and social life, of life in the school and the home, the intersections of the world of boys with the world of adults, the invasion of national politics into the privacies of the home, the steady winding up of the springs of discontent and resentment against the Angrezi Sarkar, all, all are thrown into the narrative; and a whole age with its characteristic ethos, the clash between tradition and change, the play of variety, the bursting humanity, all come out alive in the seemingly endless pages of the novel.

One of the four sons of Babu Ram Chand, Krishan is subject to all the visible and invisible stresses and tensions in a sprawling family of uncles, aunts, cousins and other relations. Oscillating between the home and the world, schooling and day-dreaming, he also 'falls in love' with Devaki his aunt, Mumtaz his brother's mistress, Shakuntala the doctor's wife and Helen the clarinet player's daughter, always seeing in his present flame the image of Sophia of Reynolds's *Mysteries of the Court of London*! Parallel with Krishan's movement from innocence to experience, there is also the movement from the war years (1914-18) to the beginnings of the Gandhian era sparked off by the Amritsar massacre. The reign of terror instituted by the Angrezi Sarkar, General Dyer's infamous exploits, and the mounting horror of the people at the sordid happenings of the time (Krishan himself receives seven stripes for disregarding the curfew), come out in these pages vividly enough. The Jallianwallah Baugh atrocity affects Krishan almost directly, for the women wail in the lanes for the men dead or not returned, and "my eyes were blood-shot. My soul was on fire. The wound hurt as though, instead of healing, it opened up and became raw again".

In his thoughts, words and actions, Krishan is rather too mature for his tender years. He thinks quickly, falls in love quickly, takes to his sick bed for long spells, and often acts with sudden resolution. The growth from boyhood to early adolescence is a painful, ambiguous, exciting and dangerous

process, and Anand has brought real understanding into the portrayal of this period of Krishan's life. Very little is left out, and there is hardly any sophistication or mere sentimentalizing; and, cumulatively, as the details pile up, the whole complex of life in the Punjab over half a century ago becomes animate again. The reader grumbles off and on that he is treated to an oppressively heavy fare of situation, incident, conversation and even speculation; but he soon accepts it all, because everything helps to build up the total picture.

From the heap of multitudinous detail, the jungle of characters and incidents, Krishan's own personality clearly reveals itself, and one recognizes the incipient thinker, the boy revolutionary, the man of moods and emotions, the staunch friend of Bakha the untouchable boy, and the wild-eyed creature determined to find his voice as a poet. "If, as father said, I was an imbecile", says Krishan, "I was a divine imbecile, who listened to the music and rhythms and evocations inside me". This is part of the truth; the other part is that Krishan's fret and fever are due (as diagnosed by a certain 'Jewel of Doctors') to his 'tummy upset', his 'crazy brain' and to 'a canker in the soul'. Apart from Krishan himself, the novel is peopled with a variety of characters who almost create the impression that we are here following, not the life-history of an individual alone, but that of a people, of a society. Old-world manners, customs, attitudes, vanished scenes and long-forgotten incidents, come back as if somebody is unrolling a treasured tapestry. Much of the communal life described here differs little from the life of the people in other parts of India, even in the extreme south, for the words, exclamations, idioms, gestures are the same everywhere. On the surface, political and economic rivalry tends to create sharp divisions; but social life is the invisible underground river. That it should be possible to identify Krishan with Indian boyhood and the life around Krishan with Indian humanity at large is not the least of the merits of this immense autobiographical novel. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Anand's sheer exuberance and zest for life score over his limitations as a modern practitioner of the art of the novel.

The qualities of acute observation and vivid delineation that mark Anand as a novelist are seen equally—often mixed with

a strain of poetry—in his short stories also. In 'The Barber's Trade Union', Anand immortalizes Chandu the barber as he has immortalized Bakha the untouchable and Munoo the coolie. 'A Rumour' is the story of Dhandu the carpenter who goes in search of a job and is run over on the way by a lorry: here the sting of irony is in the title itself. There are stories of the ineffectual terrorist, Singh, and the wretched informer, Gopal; there are three 'prose poems' that explore the consciousness of children; there is 'A Kashmir Idyll', in which a Nawab dies of a fit of laughter, and there is the 'crime' in 'The Maharaja and the Tortoise' which ultimately ushers in Ramrajya! Amusing, satirical, ironic, tragic, pathetic or farcical, Anand can play any note he wants, and he can present human weaknesses with understanding and sympathy. Anand sees life sometimes as a comedy, sometimes as a tragedy, and sometimes the two modes fuse distractingly; and at his best his work challenges comparison with that of the great masters of the art of the short story.

As a writer of fiction, Anand's notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality. He is a veritable Dickens for describing the inequities and idiosyncrasies in the current human situation with candour as well as accuracy. Of Anand's early novels at least it can be said that they come fresh from contact with the flesh and blood of everyday existence. He has no laborious psychological or ideological preoccupations, and he is content to let his characters live and speak and act. In his work there are no merely sentimental portraits, and generally he presents his characters with a lively curiosity and also a deep compassion. Some of his English characters, no doubt, are no more than caricatures, but then there are others whose words ring true and whose actions seem natural. The titles of his early novels—*Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Village*—seem to emphasize the universal as against the particular: as if Bakha is *all* 'untouchables', Munoo is all 'coolies'; however, being a true artist, Anand makes the individual—Bakha or Munoo—assert his uniqueness, without quite ceasing to be the universal. There is a 'case', an implied point of view; but the novel is more than the case, for it is humanity that finally triumphs. The language too, with its load of swear-words and expressions literally translated from the vernacular idiom (for example, 'rape sister', 'rape mother',

'rapers of your daughters', 'the illegally begotten', 'son of a witch', 'where have you died', 'devil without horns', 'eater of monsters', etc.) often produces a crude or ludicrous effect. On the other hand, the very frequency of their occurrence tends to blunt the edges of their literal meaning, and make them sound (as such swear-words must) empty and almost innocuous. As a writer, Anand is often undistinguished, and seems to be too much in a hurry; but the vitality of his creations, the variegated richness of his total comprehension, and the purposive energy of his narratives carry all before them. It is also worthy of mention that Anand is a 'committed' writer. As he wrote to me in July 1961:

I am...doing some village social welfare work in order to integrate my love for the poor with actual work for them....I never realized, as intensely as I do now, the reasons why both Tolstoy and Gandhi chose the peasantry for their devotion. After writing for many years about pains of these people, I now feel that, for their sake, it may not all have been in vain. *The Old Woman and the Cow* and *The Road* will confirm the poetic truth that the alleviation of pain and its expiation are the only values given to our intelligentsia in the present time.

Note: When this chapter was originally written in 1961, I wasn't aware of the autobiographical nuances in *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, which Saros Cowasjee has brought out in his Introduction to the new edition of the novel (1970). I now see things in the novel that I couldn't see before, and in my long review in *Deccan Herald* (April 1971), I have referred to its vivid sense of history, its richness of incident and character, its considerable narrative power, and, above all, its fearless compassion. *Private Life* will surely take its place as an integral part of Anand's "work in progress", the *comédie humaine* for twentieth century India.

It is not easy to make a living in India as a man of letters. People don't buy books enough, there aren't adventurous or reliable publishers enough, book reviewing is not quick or helpful enough, and current critical standards aren't informed or exacting enough. One can turn out an occasional poem or short story or even a novel while earning one's bread and butter in a safe or steady occupation like law, medicine, teaching, business, Government Service, journalism—that is, if one hasn't the present-day Indian equivalent of the Virginia Woolfian desiderata (for women writers) of 'a room of one's own and £500 per year'. But to make serious writing—'creative writing', if you will—one's career is too risky anywhere, and more so in India for one who chooses to write in English, especially if one has been improvident enough to marry and have children. As in the United Kingdom, here in India too the writer has at least to try to supplement his income (or neutralize his losses) through journalistic hack-work or preparation of text-books or translations for the Sahitya Akademi. Grow the cabbages that pay at once so that some roses too may be grown to meet the soul's need for beauty. All this is like squaring the circle, but that is about the only way in which most serious writers can now-a-days hope to keep body and soul together. .

Like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan too has somehow managed (with what difficulties and trials we do not know) to remain a writer. Anand at least has, it would appear, some political axes to grind, though these do not offensively intrude into his creative writing. But Narayan has no axes of any kind: he is that rare thing in India today, a man of letters pure and simple. Born in 1907 in Madras, he hails—diagonally speaking—from the opposite extremity to the North Western, which was Anand's place of birth. Narayan's mother-tongue is Tamil,

he has settled down in Mysore, where the regional language is Kannada, and he writes in English. Whereas Anand 'finished' his education in Cambridge and London, Narayan had his education entirely in South India. He is of India, even of South India: he uses the English language much as we used to wear dhoties manufactured in Lancashire—but the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness, are all of the soil of India, recognizably autochthonous. He is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection. There is a norm of excellence below which Narayan cannot possibly lower himself. After some hand-to-mouth journalism for a few years, Narayan published his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, in 1935. It was, we learn, a college student M. N. Srinivas (now the distinguished sociologist) that first read the manuscript and "certified it as readable". *Swami and Friends* created (or re-created) for the first time the now famous 'Malgudi', and seemed at the time to have a formal kinship with Richmal Crompton's 'William' novels. Two more of Narayan's novels appeared in quick succession: *Bachelor of Arts* (1936) and *The Dark Room* (1938). Then the war came and Narayan was apparently obliged to bide his time. He edited the short-lived *Indian Thought*, wrote for the papers occasionally, and conserved his powers. The end of the war meant the return of spring, and *The English Teacher* (1945) was followed by *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), and *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955). An American tour was presently organized by the Rockefeller Foundation, and the fruits of this adventure are *The Guide* (1958) and *My Dateless Diary* (1960). He has also collected two volumes of his short stories (*An Astrologer's Day* and *Lawley Road*) and a volume of his weekly causeries, *Next Sunday* (1960). He has been translated into several European and Indian languages, and he has won a considerable audience in Britain and in U.S.A. The following excerpt from *My Dateless Diary* may be taken as a fair indication of Narayan's popularity in America:

Two New York paper-back publishers, whom we shall indicate as Mr. A. and Mr. B, a priest, a girl in a red gown, Lyle, and myself. We have a corner to ourselves at the dining hall of Algonquin. Publisher A sitting opposite to me, leans across to say,

'I like you *Financial Expert*. It is your best book'.

'I like your *Bachelor of Arts* better; it's my favourite', says publisher B sitting to my right.

'William Faulkner, Hemingway, and Narayan are the world's three great living writers', says A.

I blush to record this, but do it for documentary purposes...

'Take out Hemingway and put in Graham Greene. Faulkner, Narayan, and Graham Greene', says Lyle.

In an article on 'The Fiction Writer in India' contributed a few years ago to the special *Atlantic Monthly* supplement on India, Narayan remarked that during the period of nationalist agitation the subject matter of fiction "became inescapably political...the mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution, and above all the detached observation, which constitute the stuff of fiction, were forced into the background". After independence, however, the writer in India "hopes to express through his novels and stories the way of life of the group of people with whose psychology and background he is most familiar, and he hopes that this picture will not only appeal to his own circle but also to a larger audience outside". Whether this is an altogether correct description of conditions in India or not, it certainly indicates Narayan's own interests, predilections and hopes as a writer of fiction. Speaking generally, Narayan's is the art of resolved limitation and conscientious exploration: he is content, like Jane Austen, with his 'little bit of ivory', just so many inches wide: he would like to be a detached observer, to concentrate on a narrow scene, to sense the atmosphere of the place, to snap a small group of characters in their oddities and angularities: he would, if he could, explore the inner countries of the mind, heart and soul, catch the uniqueness in the ordinary, the tragic in the prosaic. 'Malgudi' is Narayan's 'Casterbridge', but the inhabitants of Malgudi—although they may have their recognizable local trappings—are essentially human, and hence, have their kinship with all humanity. In this sense, 'Malgudi' is everywhere.

In *Swami and Friends*, Malgudi is neither village nor city, but a town of modest size. With each new novel we advance in time (a few years at a step) and Malgudi grows in importance and gains in definition. The major landmarks, however, remain. The River Sarayu flows by its side. Fringing Malgudi or just beyond it are Nallappa's Mango Grove and the Mempi Forest, reached by the Grove Street and the Forest Road respectively. There is a Trunk Road to Trichinopoly. One can board the train for Madras at the Malgudi Station. (Can it be that Lalgudi, in Trichinopoly District, and fringing the River Cauvery, is the original of 'Malgudi'?) Within the town there is the Market Road, which is described as "the life-line of Malgudi" in *Mr. Sampath*. This road intersects the Race Course Road (we often pass through it in *The Dark Room*). There are various streets and lanes: Kabir Street and Kabir Lane, Anderson Lane, Sarayu Street, Kulam Street, Smith Street, Vinayaka Mudali Street, Abu Lane, Ellamman Street (the last street), Keelacheri—tell-tale names in the Tamil country.

So much for the old town. Like Delhi and New Delhi, there are old and new towns ('Extensions') everywhere. In Malgudi, too, there are the Extensions with their cross roads and trim houses. There is Lawley Extension, named after Sir Frederick Lawley, but later re-named as 'Gandhi Nagar'. This craze for changing names is lightly glanced at in the title story in *Lawley Road*:

...an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council...at once they decided to nationalize the names of all the streets and parks, in honour of independence. They made a start with the park at the Market Square. It used to be called The Coronation Park...henceforth to be 'Hamara Hindustan Park'....The town became unrecognizable with new names. Gone were the 'Market Road', 'North Road', 'Chitra Road', 'Vinayaka Mudali Street', and so on. In their place appeared the names, repeated in four different places, of all the ministers, deputy ministers, and the members of the Congress Working Committee. Of course, it created a lot of hardship—letters went where they were not wanted...

All this, however, was to happen much later, in the wake of independence in the late forties. But even in the early thirties, Malgudi has a municipality, a Town Hall (with its Tower too!),

a Club, and two schools—the Albert Mission School and the Board High School. The schoolboys are cricket conscious, and talk of Bradman, Hobbs and Tate. In 1930, Swami is a pupil, first in the Albert Mission and later in the Board High School. The Mission School is already Albert Mission College from which the hero of *Bachelor of Arts* graduates and in which the hero of *The English Teacher* lectures on English literature. Singaram the old peon in the Mission School survives to receive a tip from Krishnan the English teacher when he leaves the hostel for good to set up house with his young wife and child. Even in *Swami and Friends* we hear of motor cars, and Swami has an exciting ride to the Club in his father's friend's car. In *The Dark Room*, the hero (Ramani) has his own Chevrolet with its hoarse hooting, and it comes in handy when he takes out his mistress, Shanta, for moonlit drives to the banks of the Sarayu. But, then, we are already in 1935:

Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped theatre—the Palace Talkies—which simply brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed variety hall, which from time immemorial had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered silent films.

Nay more: there is the Engladia Insurance Company, of which Ramani is the Branch Manager. (There is also the Engladia Banking Corporation in *Mr. Sampath*.) Malgudi is evidently looking up: the Regal Haircutting Saloon, the Malgudi Photo Bureau, the Suburban Stores, the Truth Printing Works, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank (in front of which Margayya the 'financial expert' begins his meteoric career), all lend distinction to the place. The hotels spring up, one by one: Anand Bhavan, Modern Lodge, and—the Taj! In *The Dark Room*, we venture a little across the river and into Sukkur village. In *Mr. Sampath*, we go to a Studio on the other bank of the Sarayu. In *The Financial Expert*, a trip to Madras becomes necessary to recover the lost sheep—Margayya's son, Balu. In it, too, there are references to tea estates on Mempi Hills; we hear of ruined temples and of half a dozen jungle-tribes on the top of the Hills. In *The Guide*, there are the "spacious bamboo jungles of Mempi", and we are privileged to explore Sarayu's

source on Mempi Peaks. Marco (of *The Guide*) takes rooms in Mempi Peak House on the topmost cliff:

....there was a glass wall covering the north veranda, through which you could view the horizon a hundred miles away. Below us the jungle stretched away down to the valley, and on a clear day you might see the Sarayu sparkling in the sun and pursuing its own course far away. This was like heaven to those who loved wild surroundings....

Marco explores caves with their carved doorways and wall-paintings, and discovers musical notations on the walls. (Malgudi can be mere Lalgudi no more, if ever it was; the old familiar taluka town has now acquired richer, more exotic, surroundings, without quite changing its essential self. Has Lalgudi merged with Yadavagiri to become Malgudi?) It would be interesting to advance the theory that Malgudi is the real 'hero' of the ten novels and the many short stories: that underneath the seeming change and the human drama there is something—the 'soul' of the place?—that defies, or embraces, all change and is triumphantly and unalterably itself. All things pass and change: men and women try to live, and even as they are living they are called upon to die: names change, fashions change, but the old landmarks—the Sarayu, the Hills, the jungles, the Grove—remain. "The One remains, the Many change and pass".

On closer scrutiny, even the characters in these novels seem to achieve a sort of transmigration from body to body, name to name and ultimately to blur the sharpness of the distinctions under the haze of a general acceptance. Swami is also the Bachelor of Arts; he is presently Krishnan the English Teacher—though he couldn't be Ramani, of *The Dark Room*. The agreeable rascal Mr. Sampath is also Mr. Margayya and later Railway Raju the Guide, Vasu the taxidermist, and Mali the novel-writing machinist. The disappointed lover of *Bachelor of Arts* becomes a Sadhu for a change: the discharged convict is taken for a Sadhu in *The Guide*: and, in between, there is the true, historical Mahatma of *Waiting for the Mahatma*. 'Sadhu' 'Sannyasi', 'Swami' and 'Mahatma' are names that can cover many sins and describe many virtues. Susila of *The English*

Teacher, Brinda of *The Financial Expert* and Bharati of *Waiting for the Mahatma* are all variations on the theme of Indian girlhood, and Shanta of *The Dark Room*, Shanti of *Mr. Sampath* and Rosie of *The Guide* are also kindred souls. There are no 'good' and no 'bad' characters in Narayan's novels. Human nature is presented veraciously and interestingly and memorably, and there is no overt condemnation or praise. As well praise or condemn the river or the midday sun for being what it is! Malgudi and Malgudi humanity are the one theme of these various fictional essays, and each new novel is a jerk of the kaleidoscope when a new engaging pattern emerges to hold our attention. And, indeed, Malgudi has been more or less like this, not only during the last twenty years of seeming topographical and technological change, but also during the long vistas of the past. Srinivas the scenario-writer in *Mr. Sampath* imaginatively passes in review the possible history of Malgudi since Puranic times: perhaps Rama (the exiled Prince who was verily God) passed the village on his way to Lanka, perhaps He made the Sarayu flow; perhaps the Buddha preached at the very spot where now Lawley Extension sprawls about; perhaps Sankara preached Vedanta here:

Dynasties rose and fell. Palaces and mansions appeared and disappeared. The entire country went down under the fire and sword of the invader, and was washed clean when Sarayu overflowed its bounds. But it always had its rebirth and growth...

All things pass and change: "Even madness passes. Only existence asserts itself".

A quick review of the novels is all that can now be attempted here. In some respects, *Swami and Friends* is the most enjoyable of the novels. As one reads it, one becomes nostalgic almost, for one has been oneself one of these boys—Swami the average, even the obscure; Somu the self-important monitor; Mani "the mighty good-for-nothing"; Samuel (otherwise known as 'Pea') the ordinary; and Rajam with his dash, romance, and propensity for leadership. One has also studied under the "fire-eyed" Vedanayakam and the fanatical Ebenezer. One has dreamt, planned, blundered; one has quarrelled with one's friends, fought pitched battles, and made sensible treaties. One has taken part in hartals

and strikes, one has (perhaps) been pounced upon by the Police. One has played games—even Cricket the 'King of Games'—or at least cheered one's comrades. The whole of one's boyhood is recalled here; change Sarayu to Tambravarni, Vaigai, Cauvery, Krishna or Godavari, and Malgudi to one of the hundreds of similar riverside towns in India, and the story of Swami and his friends would be true anywhere. It is as though everyday actuality has taken Narayan's pen and written out this universal epic of all our boyhood yesterdays that are now no more. Nor is drama lacking in this story of 'lower form' schoolboys: and the crisis in friendship brought about by Swami's failure to play in the cricket match is resolved at last in the Railway Station, with Swami looking up, contrite and expectant, and Rajam, regal and responsive, in the moving train.

We hear of Swami in one of the short stories also ('Father's Help' in *An Astrologer's Day*). Evidently it belongs to an earlier period than that described in the novel, but it equally brings out Swami's 'peculiar' nature. First he glibly lies to his father about Samuel, the geography teacher, but when his father takes up the challenge and writes a complaint to the Head Master, Swami is afraid and is full of regrets. He is eager to be caned by Samuel so that his earlier lies may be justified now at least! He behaves cheekily again and again till Samuel's patience is exhausted and he gives the boy his heart's wish:

Swaminathan left his seat joyfully and hopped on the platform. The teacher took out his cane from the drawer and shouted angrily: 'Open your hand, you little devil'. He whacked three wholesome cuts on each palm. Swami received them without blenching. After half a dozen the teacher asked: 'Will these do, or do you want some more?'

Swami merely held out his hand again, and received two more; and the bell rang. Swami jumped down from the platform with a light heart, though his hands were smarting...

And since the Head Master is providentially absent, there is no need to hand over the complaint.* In another story ('The

* For Swami's misadventures, indeed, there is no end. 'A Hero' (in *Lawley Road*) describes Swami as a 'hero' in spite of himself, for he inadvertently brings about the capture of a notorious house-breaker. Next day his classmates view him with respect and the headmaster calls Swami a true scout.

'White Flower' in *Lawley Road*), we have in miniature part of the history of the 'Bachelor of Arts'. Krishna is a student in the B.A. class, and sees a girl at the street tap, and she too gets used to seeing him there. (In the novel, the meeting place is the Sarayu.) It is a wordless wooing, for in Malgudi conventions are still paramount, and such liberties as lovers' talk or 'dating' are unheard of. Marriage has to be within the caste, and the move has to come from the girl's parents. Somehow (thanks to the initiative of a third party) things start moving, and the girl's and the boy's horoscopes are exchanged and compared. Now comes the hitch: one astrologer says that they don't match, while another says they do. It is decided as a compromise that the parties should leave the decision to God. Two flowers—the white one for 'Yes' and the red for 'No'—are placed before Hanuman, and a girl of five is asked to pick up one of them:

Everybody held his breath and waited, the child stooped to pick, and Krishna, unable to bear the strain, shut his eyes. When he opened them, he saw the white flower on the polished door-step of the innermost sanctuary. 'He knows what is best for us', said the elders pointing to the idol. Krishna felt stunned for a long time, and when he recovered he wished that he had it in his power to bleach all the flowers in the world.

In the novel *Bachelor of Arts* the hero (not a mere student in the B.A. class but a full-fledged B.A. who, after hectic preparations, has already stormed the gates of success in the examination) carries his frustration to the point of renouncing the world and becoming a wandering Sadhu. With rigid caste prohibitions to be respected and difficult astrological hurdles to be crossed, how can there be 'love marriages' in India? And can 'arranged marriages' ever succeed? But 'marry and love' seems, in practice, to be at least as sensible a path to love in marriage as 'love and marry'. However irrational it may appear, horoscopes and parents often arrange marriages quite satisfactorily. The Sadhu returns home and finds that the girl chosen by his parents is really very charming. They marry in due course and our Bachelor of Arts (now the married man) takes a job as a newspaper correspondent. There is no harm in assuming

at this stage that within two or three years Krishna (or the Bachelor of Arts) has become the teacher of English Literature in the Albert Mission College. From a room in the hostel he moves to a corner house in Sarayu Street. His wife Susila and his child Leela come to stay with him. The story of their wedded life is a prose lyric on which Narayan has lavished his best gifts as a writer. Spring is no hard material substance: it is a presence, it is an unfolding, it is ineffable becoming that strains after Being. A thousand little occurrences, leaps of light, bubbles of sound, a thousand smiles revealing their rainbow magnificence through the film of tearful happiness or fulfilment, a thousand murmurs of ecstasy, meaningless worries, tremendous trifles, a thousand stabs of pain that are somehow transcended, a thousand shared anxieties, excitements and adorations: it is out of these that the texture of wedded happiness is wrought, and Narayan is an adept at giving form and meaning to this glory of holy wedded love. Quotation is difficult because the perfume is nowhere concentrated but fills the entire atmosphere. Here, for example, is Narayan's description of his hero receiving his wife and child at the station:

...I was pacing the little Malgudi railway station in great agitation. I had never known such suspense before. She was certain to arrive with a lot of luggage, and the little child. How was all this to be transferred from the train to the platform? and the child must not be hurt. I made a mental note, 'Must shout as soon as the train stops: "Be careful with the baby".' This seemed to my fevered imagination the all-important thing to say on arrival...

A whirling blur of faces went past me as the train shot in and stopped...I hurried through the crowd, peering into the compartments. I saw my father-in-law struggling to get to the doorway. I ran up to the carriage. Through numerous people getting in and out, I saw her sitting serenely in her seat with the baby lying on her lap. 'Only three minutes more!' I cried. 'Come out!' My father-in-law got down...and in a moment I was beside my wife in the compartment.

'No time to be sitting down: give me the baby', I said. She merely smiled and said: 'I will carry the baby down. You will get these boxes. That wicker box, bring it down yourself, it contains baby's bottle and milk vessels'. She picked up the child and unconcernedly moved on...I cried: 'Susila, mind the door and baby'. All the things I wanted to say on this occasion were muddled and gone out of mind. . .

There follows the reunion on the platform, a piece of subdued ecstasy seasoned with the humour that hurts not, but rather emphasizes the filiations between prose and poetry in everyday life:

I wouldn't have cared if the train had left now. The mother and child stood beside the trunks piled up on the platform. I gazed on my wife, fresh and beautiful, her hair shining, her dress without a wrinkle on it, and her face fresh, with not a sign of fatigue. She wore her usual indigo-coloured silk saree. I looked at her and whispered: 'Once again in this saree, still so fond of it', as my father-in-law went back to the compartment to give a final look round. 'When will she wake up?' I asked pointing at the child, whom I found enchanting, with her pink face and blue shirt.

And so on, page after page, the brush strokes clear and sure: this is a chastened Romeo married to a sensible Juliet, this is a 'lower middle class' Ferdinand enacting married love with a rather unexotic Miranda. Because they love intensely, everything is lovely, all is lovable, and even little quarrels are suffused with poetry. Months pass, the child completes three years, and there is a proposal to buy or build a house of their own. On a Sunday morning, husband and wife decide to explore Lawley Extension for a house or a site. The preparations for the adventure are a mixture of toil and romance:

We were up with the dawn...I had to light the fire and boil the water for coffee while Susila bathed, dressed, and prepared herself, for the outing. As I sat struggling with smoke in my eyes and nostrils, she appeared at the kitchen doorway, like a vision, clad in her indigo saree, and her hair gleaming and jasmine covered. I looked at her indigo saree and smiled to myself. She noticed it and asked 'Why that'?

'Nothing, nothing', I said with a cold damp in my nose. My voice was thick. 'What is wrong with this saree? It is as good as another,' she said.

'Yes, yes', I replied...Her eyes sparkled with joy: she spread the fragrance of jasmine more than ever. 'The divine creature!' I reflected within myself, looking at her tall, slim figure.

They leave the child in the care of the maidservant and begin the day's odyssey. Market Road: stray students salute their English Teacher: tiffin at Ananda Bhavan: walk along the

Sarayu: plans for an all-India tour: drive in a *julka* to Lawley Extension: inspecting vacant houses for sale: the infected lavatory: visit to the Temple and burning incense before the image of God Srinivasa:

In this flickering light the image acquired strange shadows and seemed to stir, and make a movement to bless—I watched my wife. She opened her eyes for a moment. They caught the light of camphor flame, and shone with an unearthly brilliance. Her cheeks glowed, the rest of her person was lost in the shadows of the temple hall. Her lips were moving in prayer. I felt transported at the sight of it. I shut my eyes and prayed: 'God bless this child and protect her'.

Susila's entry, first into the infected latrine, and then into the Temple,—what a preordained sequence! The same evening she takes ill, it proves to be typhoid, and Krishna moves about in a delirium of fret and anxiety and love. Susila's parents arrive, but there is still no truce to the husband's baffling fears and hopes. The see-saw in the temperature chart goes on; there is then a sudden change for the worse, and the end comes at last. The body is laid on the ground, it is taken across Nallappa's Grove to the cremation ground. There are no more surprises or shocks for the bereaved husband, nothing to worry or interest him in life.

The description of Krishna's married life—the first few years of happiness, the excruciating agony during the weeks of Susila's illness, the 'last journey' to the cremation ground—is one of the most moving and flawless pieces of writing in modern English fiction. Not a word is wasted, and not a word rings false. The second half of the novel, on the other hand, takes us to unfamiliar regions. Krishna's numbed misery and his anxiety to be mother and father both to Leela are understandable enough. But the experiments in psychic communication with Susila with the help of a medium introduce a whimsical or fantastical element into a story that has so long been so transparently true to life. The eccentric 'headmaster' of the 'pyol' school and his termagant wife and their wild children make for further variety. Automatic writing and attempts at psychic contact with the dead are not altogether uncommon: and the soil of India doubtless breeds every type of idealist and eccentric, waif and vagabond. Nevertheless it is difficult to feel that the first and second halves of

The English Teacher blend naturally and make an artistic whole. The theme of the novel is obviously the 'death' of Susila in the first half and her 'resurrection' in the second half: Paradise Lost being followed by Paradise Regained. In Kalidasa's play, Dushyanta loses Sakuntala *here*, and rejoins her in the Ashram of Marichi *there*—on the other bank as it were. Krishna too loses Susila in the flesh, yet—on the last page of the novel—she comes back to him, to be with him forever. He has resigned his post as lecturer in the college to become a teacher of children under the idealistic 'headmaster'. Albert Mission College arranges a farewell party, and Krishna returns home with the jasmine garland. He reflects sadly on the way that there is no Susila at home to receive the garland. Back in his lonely room, he cries in an access of despair: My wife, my wife, my wife. Now the miracle happens, for she is by his side:

'Susila! Susila!' I cried. 'You here!' 'Yes, I'm here, have always been here'. I sat up leaning on my pillow...I looked her up and down and said: 'How well you look!' Her complexion had a golden glow, her eyes sparkled with a new light, her saree shimmered with blue interwoven with 'light', as she had termed it. . . . There was an overwhelming fragrance of jasmine surrounding her...I picked up the garland from the nail and returned to bed. I held it to her...She received it with a smile, cut off a piece of it and stuck it in a curve on the back of her head. She turned her head and asked: 'Is this all right?'

'Wonderful', I said, smelling it.

Is Krishna dreaming? Is it anything more than the physical projection of Krishna's psychic ecstasy? Even so, isn't this a resurrection greater than life! "The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved", Krishna concludes his autobiographical narrative; "It was a moment of rare, immutable joy—a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death".

Swami and Friends, *Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher* are, for all practical purposes, a trilogy of Malgudi-on-Sarayu. *The Dark Room*, which appeared between the 'Bachelor' and the 'Teacher', is a novel apart, a study of domestic disharmony (as *The English Teacher* is the song of love in marriage). Ramani is an insurance executive, whereas Krishna is a teacher of English poetry: a significant difference. Ramani has a com-

fortable salary (not a mere Rs. 100 per month, which is Krishna's monthly wages), he has a car of his own, he has a middle-aged wife and three grown-up children. There is a streak of the ruffian and the cad in Ramani,—and, indeed, in many respects, he is a sharp contrast to Krishna. Savitri is not simply a Susila who has reached the thirties: she lacks the ineluctable poetry of Susila, the capacity to be at once a goddess and a woman, the eternal feminine and the womanly woman. Ramani blows hot too often, and Savitri sulks too readily. 'The dark room' used to be as indispensable a part of an Indian house as a kitchen, and was a place for 'safe deposits', both a sanctuary—and a retreat; but modern houses are apt to dispense with the 'dark room'. Even in the old houses, the installation of electric lights has effectively destroyed the traditional character of the 'dark room'. Narayan has thus done well to preserve—like the mummified curiosities of ancient Egypt—the 'dark room' in the pages of his novel.

Ramani and Savitri (and their three children, Balu, Kamala and Sumati) live happily enough—the sudden extremes of domestic storms and lulls notwithstanding—till glamorous Shanta, the probationary insurance assistant, enters upon the scene. At once she casts a spell on Ramani, and he becomes her lover and her slave. Savitri comes to know of this, and late one evening she demands an explanation from Ramani. His callous behaviour strikes some fire in her, and she is for the nonce transformed into Ibsen's Nora, asserting her elementary rights as a woman:

Do you think I am going to stay here?...Do you think that I will stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here, and eat food you buy with your money? No, I'll starve and die in the open, under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no man...Things? I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's... Yes, you are right. They (the children) are yours, absolutely. You paid the midwife and the nurse. You pay for their clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say a woman owns nothing?

Ramani is an even cruder Helmer, and so Savitri defiantly walks out of the "doll's house", leaving her husband and children

behind. But just when we are half-way through the novel, the current changes—as in *The English Teacher* also—and one feels that the hour-glass is turned upside down. From tragedy to fantasy, in *The English Teacher*; and, here, from incipient tragedy to a whimpering anti-climax. Savitri wanders aimlessly in the night and is a prey to conflicting emotions. She is rescued in time by a burglar when she is about to be carried away by the river. The burglar's wife looks after Savitri for two or three days. But she keeps on thinking of her children, and decides to pocket her pride and return home. Meanwhile Ramani has been having an uncomfortable time with the children. But his versatility is amazing: he leaves his children in the cinema house at six, spends a couple of hours with Shanta, and is back in time to take his children home. Savitri returns one morning, and 'normalcy' (which includes the liaison with Shanta) returns. A cynical conclusion, this, but one knows, too, that there are pinchbeck domestic tyrants like Ramani, and also women like Savitri whose badge is sufferance. The tradition, in fact, is as old as the ancient Tamil bardic story of Kovalan and Kannaki.

Waiting for the Mahatma is another novel that stands apart, though chronologically it falls between *The Financial Expert* and *The Guide*. In two respects, *Waiting for the Mahatma* is exceptional: the action strays out of Malgudi (going as far as Delhi), and the two central characters (Bharati and Sriram) are existentially 'engaged' in politics. In *Untouchable*, Anand gives the Mahatma a part towards the end. Other novelists, whether writing in English or in the regional languages, have likewise exploited the magic of Gandhi's name and presence, but seldom is the Gandhian role subsumed in the fiction as a whole. Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part: on the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel into a biography if he is given a major (or the central) part. The best thing for the contemporary novelist would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence felt indirectly. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the theme is apparently the Bharati-Sriram romance which, however, gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to the Mahatma. Since the stress is not merely on Gandhi's influence but on Gandhi him-

self—we see him in Malgudi stationed in Nallappa's Grove and we see him, years later, in Delhi on his way to prayer on the fatal day, 30 January 1948—the novel develops a duality of interest which is not wholly resolved by the compulsion of art. *Waiting for the Mahatma* is an ambitious effort, and an impressive feat; but one also feels that Narayan's art—now denied the security of Malgudi and catapulted into Gandhian or terrorist political action—betrays unsureness and perplexity. Bharati herself is a masterful young heroine, a Malgudi Portia rich only in her natural endowments, whereas Sriram can easily qualify for a Malgudi Bassanio. It is Bharati who makes a patriot and a man of Sriram, and in marriage he is certain to find in her the saviour strength that is woman's *shakti*.

In the last group of novels—*Mr. Sampath*, *The Financial Expert*, *The Guide*, *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, and *The Sweet-Vendor*—we enter an exotic world of half-headed or half-hearted dreamers, artists, financiers, speculators, twisters, adventurers, eccentrics, cranks, cinema stars, *Sannyasis*, several of them not Malgudi products at all but straying or imported from 'outside' (which may extend as far as Hollywood or the antipodes). Less and less can dear old Malgudi maintain its former sheltered existence. Malgudi is madly fanning out; there is talk of a new bridge across the Sarayu (in addition to the railway bridge), a studio on the other side of the river, and an aggressive weekly paper; and the pressure of 'outside' men, ideas and money is continuous and irresistible: where, then, is the placid Malgudi of *Swami and Friends*? Innocence has given place to experience: the nuances of humanity are lost in the rattle of civilization: the imperatives of tradition are exceeded by the impact of change, and stability and certainty are no more. Sampath, Margayya and Raju—how easily they respond to the blandishments of the hour, stifling the 'inner mumble' and pursuing the phantom 'success' with a facility that must overreach itself. The comparative calm of the thirties is gone, or is going: we are heading towards the war and the post-war years of hectic striving, chronic uncertainty, expense of spirit and lust in action. Narayan sees the new Malgudi (and the new world) as a field of unpredictable and uncontrollable forces, a theatre where farces and tragi-comedies are played without end.

There is little room in this world for sheer goodness or beauty or poetry: they must appear, if they appear at all, mixed up with much else—tawdriness, stupidity, cupidity—soiling them in consequence. Like his own Srinivas, Narayan also seems to see the world as a complicated system of checks and counter-checks, the net result being the enthronement of the Absurd:

His mind perceived a balance of power in human relationships. He marvelled at the invisible forces of the universe which maintained this subtle balance in all matters: it was so perfect that it seemed to be unnecessary for anybody to do anything. For a moment it seemed to him a futile and presumptuous occupation to analyse, criticize and attempt to set things right anywhere... If only one could get a comprehensive view of all humanity, one would get a correct view of the world: things being neither particularly wrong nor right, but just balancing themselves. Just the required number of wrongdoers as there are people who deserved wrong deeds, just as many policemen to bring them to their senses, if possible, and just as many wrongdoers again to keep the police employed, and so on and on in an infinite concentric circle.

Here is the Srinivas-Narayan 'Pisgah-Vision' of all existence as Folly and Absurdity, and these post-war novels set out to snap this vision from different angles and then project them before us in all their self-adjusted extravagance and futility. And we watch with relish these exquisite patterns of folly and self-deception, these Alnaschars and their Castles in the Air, these diminished Don Quixotes and their Dulcinea del Tobosos, these Malgudi Sanchos and their patient beasts of burden.

Quite a few Dickensian or Wodehousian characters crowd the canvas of *Mr. Sampath*. Srinivas, aged 37, with wife and children, but an unpractical idealist, founder-editor of *The Banner*, and later script-writer of *The Burning of Kama*; Ravi, still in his twenties, engrossed in a vision of Beauty once seen in the Ishwara temple and lost, a gifted but unrealized artist; the old land-lord shark, a self-styled *sannyasi*, a hesitant financier and an intolerable bore; Somu, as portly as he is rich, an ex-President of the District Board (we should now have called it Zilla Parishad!), and one of the promoters of Sunrise Pictures Limited; Sohan Lal, the calculating financier imported from outside; De Mello, with his Hollywood affiliations, a sup-

posedly technical wizard; 'V.L.G.', the 'Shiva' of a hundred pictures; Shanti the predestined 'Parvathi'; and, above all, Mr. Sampath himself—what a menagerie! The only 'normal' people are Mrs. Srinivas with her domestic budgetary problems, Mrs. Sampath with her cross to bear, and Ravi's mother with her maternal anxieties. If Narayan's first three or four novels were 'Novels of Malgudi', these later novels—beginning with *Mr. Sampath*—are but novels located *in* Malgudi. The loss in intensity is as real as the gain in extension and variety.

Once the cranks, crooks and eccentrics have been gathered together, things begin to hum and haw and creak and—there is at last the inevitable explosion. Shanti the girl chosen for playing Parvathi's part turns out to be Ravi's long-lost vision: Sampath calls her his cousin, and plans to make her his second wife. "I'm doing nothing illegal, to feel apologetic", he assures Srinivas; "After all, our religion permits us to marry many wives". The frantic shooting of the picture, *The Burning of Kama*, is in progress, and we are presently hustled by the author to the climactic scene, with Shanti as Parvathi and Sampath (not V.L.G., who has retired in a huff) as Shiva:

'Ready!' went up a cry. A whistle rang out. The extras lined up behind Parvathi and Shiva. 'Silence!' rang out another cry. 'Lights! All lights'. The lights flashed out, X-raying the dancer once again. 'Music!' Music started... The music squeezed all sense out of people and only made them want to gyrate with arms round one another. Shiva went forward, step by step; Parvathi advanced, step by step. He was still in a trance with his eyes shut, but his arms were open to receive her. Shanti's brassiere could be seen straining under her thin clothes. She bent back to fit herself into the other's arms. The Mexican melody worked up a terrific tempo. All lights poured down their brilliance... It was going to be the most expert shot ever taken. The light-boys looked down from their platforms as if privileged to witness the amours of gods. If the camera ran on for another minute the shot would be over. They wanted to cut this shot first where Shiva's arms went round the diaphanous lady's hips. But it was cut even a few seconds earlier...

Mad, maddened Ravi rushes between Shiva and Parvathi, hurls the god down unceremoniously, and carries Parvathi in his arms away. The picture is ruined; Ravi becomes a raving lunatic, but sobers down later on; Sampath retires to the rest house

on Mempi Hills with Shanti; and Srinivas (helped by a Police Inspector of all people) gives *The Banner* a new lease of life. Sampath appears once again on the scene and informs Srinivas that Shanti has left him for good, and all search has been in vain. We find him on the last page walking rather forlornly towards the railway station. As for Srinivas, he feels relieved that he has escaped a further instalment of entanglement in Mr. Sampath's teeming speculations.

The Financial Expert is, in its own sphere, quite an achievement. It is clearly and even sparkingly written, it is mildly satirical, and it is unexcitingly interesting and entertaining. Perhaps, the main defect of the novel is that the chief characters are little better than caricatures; but, then, so are the 'good companions' in *The Pickwick Papers*, and so are certain Wellsian characters like the hero of *Tono Bungay* and Mr. Chitterlow of *Kipps*, who persist in our imaginations. Mr. Margayya the 'financial expert' is also distantly paralleled by the agreeable rascal, Mr. Beluncle, the hero of V. S. Pritchett's novel of that name. In the five Parts of the novel we see Margayya, the hero, in five phases of his development: 1, the financial adviser to the peasants, with his grey, discoloured, knobby tin trunk, transacting business under a banyan tree in front of the Malgudi Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank; 2, the prosperous publisher (in collaboration with the printer, Mr. Lal) of *Domestic Harmony* (originally *Bed-Life, or the Science of Marital Happiness*); 3, 'financial adviser' and money-lender to the peasants, with his own offices in Market Road; 4, the financial 'wizard' who receives deposits and pays fabulous rates of interest; and 5, 'insolvent' Margayya, with a prospective return to where he had started. Like a boomerang, the curve of Margayya's career comes full circle in the end. There is also, nearly parallel to Margayya's, the career of his son Balu: the little boy, supposedly spoilt by the mother; the reluctant schoolboy; the failed S.S.L.C. candidate who leaves his parental roof and disappears till Margayya brings back the prodigal from Madras; Balu the married man, living in splendour in a separate house with his wife, Brinda; wastrel and rake, then (after the 'crash') the sobered Balu returning with his wife and child to his modest ancestral home. There are two links between the careers of

father and son: firstly, Mrs. Margayya, who puts up with everything and tries to smooth things over, and, secondly, Dr. Pal who gives Margayya the book on Bed-Life to publish, finds rooms in Market Road for Margayya's banking operations, later touts for depositors when Margayya starts 'a new line' in his banking business, proves Balu's evil genius, and finally brings down Margayya's financial house of cards to the ground. There is a certain chain of nemesis in the intersecting relationships between Dr. Pal and Margayya, the apostles respectively of sex and money. Margayya's ruminations and obiter dicta on money set the tone of the book and offer a clue to the extraordinary career of this Malgudi Napoleon of finance:

It's money which gives people all this (authority, dress, looks). Money alone is important in this world. Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse.

Money was like a gem which radiated subdued light all round.

There was probably no other person in the whole country who had meditated so much on the question of interest. Margayya's mind was full of it. Night and day he sat and brooded over it. The more he thought of it the more it seemed to him the greatest wonder of creation. It combined in it the mystery of birth and multiplication...It bordered on mystic perception.

...it was like the reflections in two opposite mirrors. You could really not see the end of it—it was a part of the mystic feeling that money engendered in Margayya...

The system of 'balance of power' must operate, after all: ill-gotten money only deserved to be invested in a bank like Margayya's, and so be lost for ever. Dr. Pal was the right man to decoy all the racketeers and black marketeers and war profiteers, and Margayya would receive their hoarded wealth and send it down the drain of his vast speculation. There was, three decades ago, the original of Margayya whose rates of interest lured princes and professors, scientists and civil servants, and made fools of them all. Narayan's art lies in giving such a financier an actuality of his own by setting him in a background as fantastic as his personality and career. As a picture of shady business values and of the worship of the Goddess of Getting-on, *The Financial Expert* is a capital piece of writing, as entertaining as it is enlightening.

In Narayan's next novel, *The Guide* (which won the Sahitya Akademi Prize in 1960), the principal character, Raju, is a romantic doubled with a rascal like his fictional predecessors, Margayya and Sampath. Raju too plays many 'parts', and puts into practice some of Dr. Pal's pregnant ideas on Tourism. Trying to help a rich visitor, Marco, in his researches, Raju is involved in a tangle of new relationships. Rosie, Marco's wife, becomes Raju's lover. Abandoned by Marco, Rosie realizes, with Raju's help, her ambition of becoming a dancer. But his possessive instinct finally betrays him into a criminal action, and he is charged and convicted of forgery. Coming out of the jail, he cuts off all connection with the past and sets up as a sort of ascetic or Mahatma. Once again he is caught in the coils of his own self-deception, and he is obliged to undertake a twelve-day fast to end a drought that threatens the district with a famine. In vain he tells his chief 'disciple', Velan, the whole truth about himself and Rosie, and about the crash and the incarceration. But nobody would now believe that he is—or has been—anyone other than a Mahatma. He has made his bed, and he must perforce lie on it. We are free to infer that, on the last day of the fast, he dies opportunely, a martyr:

He went down the steps of the river, halting for breath on each step, and finally reached his basin of water. He stepped into it, shut his eyes and turned towards the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer. Velan and another held him each by an arm. The morning sun was out by now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, 'Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs—' and with that he sagged down.

Does it really rain, or is it only Raju's optical delusion? Does he really die, or merely sink down in exhaustion? Has the lie really become the truth, or has it been merely exposed? We are free to conclude as we like; Narayan might say in Pirandellian fashion: "Right you are, if you think so"!

Technically, *The Guide* is an advance on the earlier novels: the present and the past are cunningly jumbled to produce an impression of suspense and anticipation. We begin with Raju's

release from prison, and Velan's recognition of a 'Swami' in him. The earlier history of Raju is supposed to be related by him to Velan much later, when the fast is in progress. This zig-zag narration gives a piquancy to the novel without quite confusing the reader. We are enabled to see the action as Raju sees it, and as the later Raju Sober sees the earlier Raju Drunk. No doubt, Raju lacks the sheer exuberance and vitality of Sampath and Margayya: and Marco is hardly three-dimensional, being merely shown and withdrawn. And Rosie? She overwhelms Raju when she first alights at the station platform:

She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice.

This is the reader's predicament too, for the portrait of Rosie (*alias* Nalini)—the elements being so strangely mixed in her—remains dusky rather than bright, being seen through the film of a lover's muddled infatuation. After all the alarms and excursions, all the excitement and suspense, all the regrets and recriminations, Raju realizes that "neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along". Rosie's own summing up is masterly: "I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is *karma*. What can we do"? There is, indeed, no failure of nemesis in *The Guide*.

In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), Sampath-Margayya-Raju achieves a further reincarnation as 'H. Vasu, M. A. Taxidermist', and Sampath's old printing press has as it were a new owner, Nataraj, as unlike Vasu as the hind is unlike the panther. We are back in Malgudi (even the title of the novel stresses the fact), but we are also often out of the town, for the 'action' of the novel takes us to the Mempi village and its tea-shop, the village temple and Kumar its ailing elephant, and the Mempi hills and their wet and wildness. We have the usual crowd of human oddities: the monosyllabic poet engaged on *Radha Kalyan*, the journalist with his plans for a news-sheet, the tea-shop owner Muthu with his altruistic anxieties,

the tailor with his sense of self-importance, the forestry official who has culled *Golden Thoughts* from the world's literature, and, finally, the bungling well-meaning Nataraj-David and the bullying go-getter Vasu-Goliath, the man-eater. Nataraj and Vasu remind us of Srinivas and Sampath of the earlier novel: only client and printer have now changed their roles, though not their essential character. In the end, David is providentially rid of Goliath, and all's well that ends well. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intention cannot also be missed.

Jagan, the hero of *The Sweet-Vendor* (1967), might be some 'mute inglorious' Sriram, now forty years older, a well-to-do widower, a maker and vendor of sweets, and father of Mali who is a cross between Balu and Railway Raju. Not only does Jagan sell sweets profitably, he sells his philosophy too—but gratis. If all should follow his advice "Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self", would there be a market for sweets at all? Besides, Jagan himself is an expert in discriminating between tastes and smells. It is characteristic of Jagan that good sense and oddity achieve splendid coexistence in him; and even Gandhism and the Gita are applied only within reason. His alter ego is his 'cousin', a confidant, an adviser, an emissary extraordinary, a ready spittoon to receive his profound generalizations ("None so good as the cousin, who deserved all the sweets he ate for his listening capacity"), and a manager-in-an-emergency. In his desire to be father and mother both to his only son, well-meaning Jagan meets with rebuff, and the chasm between father and son only widens with time. Failing to make the grade at Malgudi, Mali goes to America in search of the new knowledge, and later returns with Grace, who is half Korean and half American. He plans to manufacture and market, with American collaboration, novel-writing machines. But some indigenous capital too is required, and that is where Jagan is expected to play an appropriate role. Once at least Mali condescends to explain things to his father:

With this machine anyone can write a story... You make up your mind about the number of characters. It works on a transistor and ordinary valves. Absolutely fool-proof.

The American collaborators "will be responsible for the know-how and technical personnel, help us set up the plant, run it for six months and then quit; they will also provide us with promotional material"! Haven't we heard all this from some worthy Minister or other?

While Mali is administering shock upon shock to his father, Jagan is composed and shrewd enough not to commit himself. Much better to vend sweets than vend story-making gadgets! Talking to Grace, Jagan learns that she is not really married to Mali; that, in fact, Mali is planning to get rid of her. *O tempora, O mores!* From the electronics of novel-writing, Jagan is switched back to sanity by the bearded man—"this man from the previous millennium"—whose whole life is centered in bringing a deity to life out of a stone, and installing it on a vacant temple pedestal near a pond in the recesses of the Mempi forest. It is the Goddess Gayatri—to be seen nowhere else, the deity of Radiance—who is to come out of the stone. The very thought excites the image-maker, as the story-making machine excites Mali. Jagan decides to buy the place, make it his retreat, and help the old stonemason to realize his dream. When Jagan learns that Mali has been arrested for the illegal possession of liquor, he authorises the 'cousin' to take the necessary steps, but adds significantly: "A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now".

Jagan is such a bundle of simplicity and shrewdness, of candour and fussiness, that he can be other-worldly and this-worldly at once. He reminds himself that, "at sixty, one is reborn and enters a new *janma*"; and being sixty himself, Jagan is ready to give up vending sweets so as to be able to watch a goddess come out of a stone. But a cheque-book is not superfluous baggage; and so he prudently takes it with him to his retreat. Nor does he forget Grace; it's Mali that is to blame for the muddle, not the girl; and Jagan is willing to buy her a ticket if she desires to return to America.

In his last three novels, Narayan has been trying—like a stonemason labouring to make a goddess come out of a stone—to make a good man, a godly man, grow out of a man of the earth. Raju is doubtless half knave half fool, and he remains such when he allows himself to be mistaken for a Swami, a spiri-

tual Guide, by the simple people of Mangala. But some days after he is trapped into commencing his fast, a change gradually comes over him:

For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested.

He fasts, and he prays, and he enjoys this experience; "this enjoyment", he tells himself, "is something Velan cannot take away from me". He is now—at last—dead to his old self, he is like one reborn. Hasn't the faith of the people made a new man of him? Isn't he redeemed, indeed? Some are born saints, some achieve sanctity, and some have sanctity thrust upon them. Perhaps, Raju is one of these last!

In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan introduces the 'demon', Vasu. Narayan has since narrated, in *Gods, Demons and Others* (1964), some of the mythological stories from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Yoga-Vasishtha* and other ancient classics, and perhaps *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* was itself meant to be a modern version of one of the Deva-Asura conflicts of very ancient times. Vasu is the killer of animals, the purveyor of carcasses, the enemy of Kumar the Temple elephant, and the terror of the men (the 'others'); he is of blackness all compact, he glows with evil, he is the prince of darkness. But where is the Power that is going to rid Malgudi of this demon, this cannibal, this Rakshasa? Narayan takes a hint from the Bhasmasura myth. The Asura, having won by *tapas* from Shiva the power to reduce anything whatsoever to ashes by the mere touch of his palm, promptly advances towards the God himself. Shiva flees from the Asura, and seeing this, Vishnu appears as Mohini to distract his attention. The Asura in an access of lust now forgets all about Shiva and wants to seize Mohini, but the enchantress gets him by ingenious manoeuvres to touch his own head—and so destroy himself. In Narayan's novel, it is Vasu's mistress who plays this role, apparently in inadvertence! But, then, God fulfils himself in many ways—even unorthodox ways! The miracle of Vasu's death by his own hand causes a surge

of faith in the believers, and Kumar is hale and hearty again, and Nataraj slips back into his old routine with great relief.

The conflict between good and evil is not as sharply polarized in *The Sweet-Vendor* as in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. In *The Guide*, evil takes the form of frivolity and sensuality; in *The Man-Eater*, evil is as it were anti-life, anti-Nature, anti-Faith; in *The Sweet-Vendor*, evil takes possession of Mali and uses him as a vehicle for fouling the sanctities of home and marriage, and even the sovereignty of the creative imagination. The machine that is offered as a substitute for the imagination is the last abomination of all, and terribly attractive it could be like the Toy Nightingale in Anderson's fairy tale. In the theatre of Jagan's mind, Mali's machine is pitted against the stonemason's chisel that can release a goddess from her imprisonment in stone. Just when Jagan needs a cure for the oppressive feeling induced in him by his son, there comes the bearded man as if "from another planet", as though *he* needs Jagan's help! "Who really needed help and from whom?" There is almost an inner revolution in the sweet-vendor, something akin to a religious conversion; and even as Raju is reborn, even as Nataraj emerges the stronger after his battle of survival with Vasu, Jagan too begins a new life. The end of Mali's dreams to become the manufacturer and vendor of story-writing machines might well be the beginning of his career, after his return from prison, as vendor of sweets, carrying on his father's vocation; the termination of the series of "repetitions performed for sixty years" might prove for Jagan the start of a new life of study and contemplation in the quietude of the forest; and the death of the heavy amorphous stone might betoken the birth of the Goddess of Radiance and a new lease of life for the now abandoned temple. But not until Jagan *sees* the Goddess in the stone, or at least sees her come out of the stone, will he acquire the ultimate courage to give up even his present discreet reliance on his cheque-book. In this novel, as in its immediate predecessors, Faith is arrested at the brink, and like Narayan's heroes we too are left in ambiguities and uncertainties. But at least the demon has been worsted, though the Deity hasn't arisen yet. And like Jagan who is expectantly watching the stone-breaker and image-maker at work, we too will have to hold ourselves in patience

for Narayan's next—or next—novel in which, perhaps, he will at last be able to hew his way through the ambiguities and uncertainties of his vision and craft, and let the image of Faith (even if it needs must carry the necessary 'small flaw') recognizably emerge.

It looks as though Narayan, in his recent novels, can neither be content with familiar Malgudi nor quite do without it. His experience of life, his clarifying triple vision of Man, in relation to himself, his environment and his gods, his widening and deepening sense of comedy, all give new dimensions to his art as a novelist. But once he moves out of Malgudi, he is a little uncertain in his movements, and the old sureness of touch, the sense of utter exactitude in observation and description, is seen to falter ever so slightly. Narayan's Malgudi is a much smaller place—a mere town really—compared to the vague vastness of Hardy's Wessex or the dark immensity of Faulkner's Yoknapatwapha country where the blacks and whites are massed against one another involving the past, present and future, and precipitating violent action again and again. Moving from Wessex or Yoknapatwapha to Malgudi, we move from a tropical jungle to a Municipal park. Thus it would appear that (notwithstanding the Mempi forests and hills) there is an insufficient correspondence between the action in Narayan's recent novels and the restricted Malgudi backgrounds. Again, too much perhaps is sought to be made out of hackneyed Indian motifs like cobras, Bharat Natyam, and bogus Sadhus. On the other hand, Narayan's gifts as a writer are out of the ordinary: he wields so difficult and 'alien' a language like English with masterful ease, and conveys the subtlest shades of feeling and thought; unlike Anand, he uses hardly any swear-words at all; he doesn't exploit perversion or sex, and seldom brings in controversial politics. He is a master of comedy who is not unaware of the tragedy of the human situation; he is neither an intolerant critic of Indian ways and modes nor their fanatic defender; he is, on the whole, content to snap Malgudi life's little ironies, knots of satiric circumstance, and tragi-comedies of mischance and misdirection. At his best (as in *The English Teacher*), he can present smiles and tears together, smiling through the tears in things and glimpsing the rainbow magnificence of life.

In Narayan's novels, there is generally a flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order—followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy. Swami, the Bachelor of Arts, Savitri of *The Dark Room*, Margayya's son, Balu: all run away, but later come (or are brought) back. Srinivas returns to his paper, Margayya to his knobby trunk, Nataraj to the restored quiet of his 'office'; Sriram and Bharati are, one feels, back in Malgudi; and Susila herself, defying death, is with her Krishna again. No doubt Narayan *seems* to see the world as a mere balance of forces—wrongdoers and policemen keeping one another properly engaged, light and shadow endlessly chasing each other, hope and failure for ever playing a duet never to be concluded; but the 'soul' of Narayan's fiction is not this delicately self-adjusted mechanism of ironic comedy, but rather the miracle of transcendence and the renewal of life, love, beauty, peace. It is said of Patrick White's mature novels that there is enacted in them, for people with eyes to see, the miracle of minor saints like Stan and Amy Parker, Voss and Laura, and the four obscure, apparently ineffectual dreamers in *Riders to the Chariot*. It may likewise be said of Narayan's latest novels that we do witness in them, amid all the small talk and crazed thoughts, all the comic gestures and frantic movements, the miracle of Faith enacting its own mysterious sunrise in minds darkened and deadened by the galloping herds of the sickness of modern life. From 'In my beginning is my end' to 'In my end is my beginning' is a full circle indeed.

Roughly contemporary with Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao makes with them a remarkable triad, affiliated with them in time and sometimes in the choice of themes but not in his art as a novelist or in his enchanting prose style. A novelist and a short story writer, he too is a child of the Gandhian Age, and reveals in his work his sensitive awareness of the forces let loose by the Gandhian Revolution as also of the thwarting or steadying pulls of past tradition. His four books up-to-date are the novels *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) and *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), a collection of short stories. Raja Rao hails from the Mysore State, and though the action of one of his novels strays far afield—as far, indeed, as France and England—his heart is effectively tethered to his immutable ancient moorings with the strong invisible strings of his traditional Hindu culture. In 'Javni', written as early as 1933, he has sketched with understanding affection a loyal domestic servant who accepts uncomplainingly her 'humble' situation in life and serves her employers with devotion and love. Her simplicity and innate charm, her goodness and godliness, all are brought out in a series of deft little strokes:

She was past forty, a little wrinkled beneath the lips and with strange, rapturous eyes. Her hair was turning white, her breasts were fallen and her bare, broad forehead showed pain and widowhood.

The Great Goddess Talakamma is a living Presence to her; and her mistress's brother, Ramu (the narrator of the story), is a god to Javni. Ramu's sister has more in common with Javni, in spite of caste and class differences, than with her husband or her brother:

Men can never understand us...You are too practical and too irreligious. To us everything is mysterious. Our gods are not your gods, your gods not our gods. It is a simple affair.

It is a strange world,—the Indian home caught between the Western impact and the native reaction,—and Raja Rao snaps the strangeness, the sadness, the horror and the glory of the Indian home. As Ramu leaves Javni, her eyes fill with tears; and he is sad too, for he records: "I got into the cart with a heavy heart. I was leaving a most wonderful soul". The only adequate tribute to Javni is the popular view: "Javni, she is good like a cow".

Like Javni, 'Akkayya' too is a peculiar feature in many Indian homes, the silent benefactor—'good like a cow'—of proliferating joint-families. 'Akkayya' is a deeply moving story, commemorating the life of an obscure but heroic figure, all the more heroic because her heroism is so little openly acknowledged:

She cooked for the family, sometimes discussed philosophy with my grandfather, and during the rest of the time she played with us. And, especially when by some strange misfortune three of my aunts successively died, leaving three, eight and five children, she had always enough children to take care of, and she treated them all alike, kind when they were good and severe when they were mischievous. And when these children left her, she forgot them as the cow forgets the young ones. But God always supplied her with orphan children... and it was these who stood around her as she breathed her last. That was her karma!

If Javni and Akkayya symbolize the silent heroism and selfless sacrifice of Indian womanhood, Narsiga symbolizes the beauty of an unspoilt shepherd-boy's abiding life-loyalties. What was Gandhi's impact on the Indian village with its hallowed traditions and agelong reticences? How did the Mahatma strike a simple shepherd lad like Narsiga? Raja Rao weaves a pattern of relationships between the revered Master of a local Ashram (it might be Rajaji at his Tiruchengode Ashram!), the Mahatma in the background, and the shepherd boy:

...there was a big, big man called Gandhiji, and the Master knew him, and had talked to him, and the Master worked for him. Who was this Gandhiji? Narsa had asked. 'An old man—a bewitching

man, a Saint, you know!...He looks beautiful as the morning sun, and he wears only a little loincloth like a pariah. And they say he is for us pariahs like the Master is for us pariahs...He is a great man. They say he is an incarnation of God, that is why everybody touches his feet, even Brahmins, my son...'

The boy inevitably mixes fact and fancy, and sees Gandhi as Rama the divine hero of the *Ramayana*, and the foreigner, the red-ruler, as Ravana; contemporary history shades off into myth and legend, reality is lost in the dream, and the release of Gandhi from prison is pictured as the return of Rama from Lanka:

...the Mahatma is going in the air, with his wife Sita, and in a flower-chariot drawn by sixteen steeds, each one more beautiful than the other. And they will fly through the air and the heavens will let fall a rain of flowers. The Mahatma will have the Mother on his right, and our Master at his foot, and they will go across the clouds and the stars. And we shall gaze at them...

To be Rama's servant—to be Hanuman—is the grandest achievement for a bhakta: and where should the Disciple like to be except at the feet of the Mahatma? Narsiga's logic is indeed without a flaw.

In the title-story, 'The Cow of the Barricades', the Mahatma is again in the background, while in the foreground there is the Master, counselling and sustaining the people; but the central figure is really Gauri, the cow of plenty and mother-love and infinite compassion, verily the Mother herself, Bharat Mata, Mother India. A scene in the battle of freedom is projected,—not in realistic but poetical, almost mythical, terms. A point is reached when the non-violent fight can be kept non-violent no more: the military on one side, the people (armed with picks and scythes and crowbars, even glistening swords and stolen rifles) on the other side of the barricades. The Master's words are in vain; he resigns his leadership and goes into meditation so that the city and his people may be saved from bloodshed. The common people are puzzled; owls ominously hover about in broad daylight, and when night comes there is a tense expectancy. Gauri the compassionate cow comes at last, and all feel that she will somehow save the situation. She is greeted with *Vande Mataram*! And she moves up to the top of the barri-

cedes, as if she knows what she has to do. The military is non-plussed,—is it a flag of truce?

But when they saw the cow and its looks and the tear, clear as a drop of the Ganges, they shouted out, 'Victory to the Mahatma! Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!' and joined up with the crowd. But their chief, the red man, saw this and fired a shot. It went through Gauri's head, and she fell a vehicle of God among lowly men.

A legend grows rapidly, and Gauri the Cow becomes the local tutelary goddess. The Master says that "Gauri is waiting in the Middle Heavens to be...reborn when India sorrows again before She is free"; and all feel convinced that, although the Mahatma may be wrong about politics, "he is right about the fulness of love in all creatures—the speechful and the mute". The Anglo-Indian writer, F. W. Bain, has also spoken ecstatically of the glory of the Cow in the Introduction to his *A Heifer of the Dawn*:

What is the secret of the rooted affection of the Aryan and Iranian, the Veda and the Avesta, for the Cow?

Partly, no doubt, its utilitarian value. But they are deceived, who think that this is all. There is religion in it, mysticism, aesthetic affection. The Cow is an Idea...

After describing a memorable experience of the sudden unexpected confrontation of a Cow in the Rajputana desert, Bain records simply: "Since then, every heifer, and for the sake of the heifer, even every ox, has possessed for the writer a touch of divinity". This insistence on the 'divinity' of the cow is much more than a stupid Oriental superstition: it goes back rather to the remotest memories of the race and is purposefully linked up with the symbolism of plenty and bounty and compassion and power. As Sri Aurobindo has explained in *The Secret of the Veda*,

...we see in the Veda that Aditi, the Mother of the Gods, is described both as the Cow and as the general Mother; she is the Supreme Light and all radiances proceed from her...

It is thus with sure racial insight that Raja Rao has made the

Cow's mother-gait and silent tears symbolic of India's, the Mother's, travail and the Cow's infinite patience and veiled power as symbolic of the Mother's genius for surviving her sorrows and transmuting them into the great joy to come.

This significant approach to Gandhian politics—half poetical, half whimsical—sets the tone of Raja Rao's first novel, *Kanthapura*, also. The tremors of Gandhi's impact on a South Indian village are recorded here in the chatty language of an elderly widow, and we see everything through the film of her memory, sensibility and temperament. There is the same mixture of fact and fancy, poetry and whimsy, history and legend in the novel as in the short stories. *Kanthapura* is thus remarkable in many ways: the theme is the impact of Gandhi's name and ideas on an obscure Indian village, anyone almost out of the seven lakhs of Indian villages; the story-teller is a 'grandmother' (the most gifted of story-tellers because the art of story-telling is second nature to the Indian grandmother!) who narrates for the edification of a newcomer the annals of her village long after the actual events in which she had herself participated; and the manner of her telling too is characteristically Indian, feminine with a spontaneity that is coupled with swiftness, vivid with a raciness suffused with native vigour, and exciting with a rich sense of drama shot through and through with humour and lyricism. The villager in India is an inveterate myth-maker, and he has not lost his links with the gods of tradition: the heroes and heroines of epics jostle with historic personalities, and time past and time present are both projected into time future; Gandhi Mahatma is Rama, the red-foreigner or the brown inspector of police who flourishes a lathi is but a soldier in ten-headed Ravana's army of occupation and oppression. Nay more: the Satyagrahi in prison is the divine Krishna himself in Kamsa's prison! Events gather significance after the passage of some years, the humdrum becomes the unique, the trivial becomes the heroic, and the hectic excitement of a day becomes a permanent communal possession. The political revolution is thus transcended and assimilated into the racial heritage as myth and legend.

Raja Rao explains in his Foreword why English is his chosen medium, and how his style is so unconventional because of his

attempt to adapt in English the idiom, the rhythm, the tone, the total distinctness of vernacular (in his context, Kannada) speech. This is not 'babu' English, this is not the English of the sophisticated Indians who meet in an exclusive club in Bombay, Calcutta or New Delhi. This is simply the natural speech of rural folk transmuted into English: it is as though one sees a familiar landscape through coloured glasses. The colouring, the strangeness, is unavoidable, but it doesn't alter the essential truth of the things seen or the movements observed. "The telling has not been easy", admits Raja Rao, and continues:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us...

After language, the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly...we tell one interminable tale...

The theme of *Kanthapura* may be summed up as 'Gandhi and our Village', but the style of narration makes the book more a *Gandhi Purana* than a piece of mere fiction. Gandhi is the invisible God, Moorthy is the visible *avatar*. The reign of the Red-men is Asuric rule, and it is resisted by the Devas, the Satyagrahis. The characters sharply divide into two camps: the Rulers (and their supporters) on the one hand and the Satyagrahis (and their sympathisers) on the other. There are various other divisions too: orthodoxy is pitted against reform, exploitation against sufferance, the planter against the coolies, the corrupt official against the self-respecting villager. But these lines grow hazy when the main issue between the Bureaucracy and the Satyagrahis is joined, for now most people are on one or the other side of the barricades. It is 1930: Gandhi marches with his select band of

followers to the salt pans at Dandi to break the salt laws. Suddenly the entire country is engaged in passive resistance of 'alien' authority. Salt is manufactured in open defiance of the Government, forest laws are broken, and toddy shops are picketed. What happens in Kanthapura is by no means a unique exception, but the telling of the story gives the whole affair an *itihasic*—at least a *puranic*—dignity. The narrative is hardly very straightforward: there are involutions and digressions, there are meaningful backward glances, there are rhythmic chains of proper names (Rachanna and Chandranna and Madanna; Sampanna and Vaidyanna; Satamma and Rangamma and Puttamma and Seethamma), there are hypnotic repetitions and refrains, and there are also sheer poetic iridescences. A village, a picturesque region, an epoch of social and political change, a whole complex of character and motive, reason and superstition, idealism and cold calculation, all spring up before our eyes demanding recognition and acceptance: it is almost a tour de force.

Although Raja Rao has put the story into the mouth of a 'grandmother',—although the feminine touches and mannerisms, the seemingly effortless rotation of the tongue, the meandering sentences and massive paragraphs are characteristic of the narrator,—there is nevertheless consummate 'art' in all this riot of artlessness, there is careful 'selection' behind the apparent abundance of detail, and there is an adroit polarization in the plotless grandmother's tale. Moorthy is Gandhi's man, the Satyagrahi, the leader of the non-violent movement in Kanthapura; there is, at the other extreme, Bade Khan the policeman who is the symbol of oppression, the soulless bureaucracy made visibly repulsive. But the villagers are unafraid:

What is a policeman before a Gandhi's man? Tell me, does a boar stand before a lion or a jackal before an elephant?

There is, then, Bhatta the symbol of usury and false orthodoxy and low cunning. There is Range Gowda the symbol of sense and stolidity, a sort of Sardar Patel to Moorthy the village Mahatma. The river Himavathy is herself a Presence, and the Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill is a Presence too, the protectress of the people, the guardian of Kanthapura. And beyond

the Hill is the Arabian Sea, and far beyond it the land from which the Red-men have come. In Kanthapura, there is a brahmin street, a potters' quarter, a weavers' quarter, a sudra quarter, a pariah quarter—how absurdly true of the typical Indian village! Just beyond the village lies the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the symbol of the impact of industrialization on the traditional community life at Kanthapura. In but a few pages of nervous description, life in the Coffee Estate is vivified in lurid colours, and incidents like those realistically described in Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* are here just glanced at in a hurry, suggesting much in little as in an impossible nightmare. The people of Kanthapura wear tell-tale nick-names: Waterfall Venkamma, Nose-scratching Nanjamma, Front-house Akkamma; Temple Rangappa, Coffee-Planter Ramayya, Patwari Nanjundia, Gold-bangle Somanna, Cardamom-field Ramachandra; and there is, of course, Corner-house Moorthy who goes through life as "a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic, a very prince..." Already, when the story begins, Gandhi is a legendary figure to the villagers, and is the subject of *bhajans* and *harikathas*. Jayaramachar jumbles with splendid unconcern traditional mythology and contemporaneous politics:

Siva is the three-eyed, and Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar.

Gandhi is Siva himself in human shape: he is engaged in slaying the serpent of foreign rule, as the boy Krishna killed the serpent Kaliya. Bhajans and Harikathas mix religion and politics freely and often purposefully, the reading of a newspaper becomes as serious a discipline as the reverent reading of the *Gita*, and hand-spinning is elevated into a daily ritual like *puja*. The walls of orthodoxy are suddenly breached: revolution comes as a flood, and carries all before it. Apart from Moorthy, the leading spirits of the Gandhian revolution at Kanthapura are Rangamma, Rangé Gowda and the girl Ratna. In the end it truly becomes a mass movement, the villagers comprising men and women of all the castes and professions and the labourers of the Coffee Estate readily meeting the onslaught of the bureaucracy. An unequal fight it inevitably proves to be, for the Satyagrahis are

maimed and broken and scattered, and a remnant reaches—after sore trials and vicissitudes—another village, Kashipura, beyond the border where they settle down. Some of the Satyagrahis—Rangamma, Ratna, Moorthy—spend an allotted span in jail, but the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the political truce that comes in its wake hasten the release of the Satyagrahis. Young men like Moorthy doubt the wisdom of the truce, and would rather follow the lead of Jawaharlal Nehru, the 'equal-distributionist'; for the mass of the people, however, Gandhi can do no wrong, he can be guilty of no miscalculation, and they accept the truce contentedly and await further developments patiently. In the old woman's heart there are neither regrets nor recriminations, only an abiding sense of fulfilment:

No, sister, no, nothing can ever be the same again. You will say we have lost this, you will say we have lost that. Kenchamma forgive us, but there is something that has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night, when lights come floating down from Rampur Corner, lights come floating down from Rampur and Maddur and Tippur, lights lit on the betel leaves, and with flower and kumkum and song we let them go, and they will go down the Ghats to the morning of the sea, the lights on betel leaves, and the Mahatma will gather it all, he will gather it by the sea, and he will bless us.

Gandhi's trip to England to attend the second Round Table Conference is invested with Puranic significance (as in the story, 'Narsiga'):

They say the Mahatma will go to the Red-man's country, and he will get us Swaraj... And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air, and brother Bharata will go to meet them with the worshipped sandals of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya there will be a rain of flowers.

Like Bharata we worship the sandals of the Brother saint...

It is this singular fusion of poetry and politics, the perennial with the present, that makes *Kanthapura* a distinctive novel, almost a new species of fiction. Again and again poetry floods the

parched plains like monsoon showers, for when it rains it never rains but literally pours:

In Vaisakh men plough the fields of Kanthapura. The rains have come, the fine, first-footing rains that skip over the bronze mountains, tiptoe the crags, and leaping into the valleys, go splashing and wind-swung, a winnowed pour, and the coconuts and the betel-nuts and the cardamom plants choke with it and hiss back. And there, there it comes over the Bebbur Hill and the Kanthur Hill and begins to paw upon the tiles, and the cattle come running home...and people leave their querns and rush to the courtyard, and turning towards the Kenchamma Temple, send forth a prayer, saying, 'There, there, the rains have come, Kenchamma; may our houses be white as silver', and the lightning flashes and the thunder stirs the tiles, and children rush to the gutterslabs to sail paper boats down to Kashi...

The description of the Kartik Festival of Lights is no less a brilliantly sustained piece of rhythmic prose:

Kartik has come to Kanthapura...with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays and red lights from copper-stands, and diamond lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; lights that glow from banana-trunks and mango twigs, yellow lights behind white leaves, and green light behind yellow leaves, and white light behind green leaves; and night curls through the shadowed streets, and hissing over bellied boulders and hurrying through dallying drains, night curls through the Brahmin Street and the Pariah Street and the Potters' Street and the Weavers' Street and flapping through the mango grove, hangs clawed for one moment to the giant pipal, and then shooting across the broken fields, dies quietly into the river—and gods walk by lighted streets...Kartik is a month of the gods...

There is a lilt and seductive rhythm, a curious incantatory power, in this kind of speech which coils round one more and more, and involves one inextricably in the experience. Words here are not mere words, they are more than blocks of stone; they are indeed streams of suggestion, dark rooms with central lights to brighten them, waves of sound making haunting music, and even nuclei charged with tremendous power. In a passage like the following, describing the people of Kanthapura waiting at the roadside for Moorthy on his release from prison, nervous agitation wings itself into appropriate language:

And hearts began to beat, and yet we saw no Moorthy, and yet no Moorthy, and yet no Moorthy, and yet not a hair of his head was seen, and we were silent as though in the sanctum at the camphor ceremony. Yet no Moorthy, and no Moorthy, and the bus had surely passed by the river...

And thus of Rangamma's discourses on popular science:

...she knows so many, many things, too, of the plants that weep, of the monkeys that were the men we have become, of the worms, thin-as-dust worms that get into your blood and give you dysentery and plague and cholera. She told us, too, about the stars that are so far that some have poured their light into the blue space long before you were born, long before you were born, or your father was born or your grandfather was born; and just as a day of Brahma is a million million years of ours, the day of the stars is a million million times our day, and each star has a sun and each sun has a moon, and each moon has an earth, and some there are that have two moons...and you put your eyes to a great tube and see another world with sun and moon and stars, all bright and floating in the diamond dust of god. And that gave us such a shiver, I tell you...

There is also the vivid description of the soldiers and coolies being asked to walk over the prostrate Satyagrahis, and many of them joining the Satyagrahis instead:

...and the Police, frightened, caned and caned the coolies till they pushed themselves over us; and they put their feet here and they put their hands there, but Rangamma shouted '*Vande Mataram!* Lie down, brothers and sisters', and we all lay down so that not a palm-width of space lay bare, and the coolies would not move, and we held their hands and we held to their feet and we held to their saris and dhoties and all, while the rain poured on and on. And the police got nervous and they began to kick us in our backs and stomachs, and the crowd shouted '*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!*' and someone took a kerosene tin and began to beat it, and someone took a cattle-bell and began to ring it, and they cried, 'With them, brothers, with them!' and they leaped and they ducked and they came down to lie beside us, and we shouted '*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai! Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!*'

Kanthapura is a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth—the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality. It will always have a central place in Gandhi literature.

After *Kanthapura*, a long silence: a few short stories, of

course, but alas—too few. But the Gandhian Age continued (though with a difference) during the years of the second World War and after. Raja Rao was in India, and was for a time associated with the Chetana, at Bombay. I remember vividly a lunch I had with Raja Rao and Mr. R. E. Hawkins of the Oxford University Press. Raja Rao wore a dhoti with a laced border, and his movements were leonine, and there was a certain rapidity in his speech. Over twenty years elapsed since the publication of *Kanthapura* before news came of Raja Rao's next novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*. It appeared at last late in 1960, and reading it one felt that one had not waited so long in vain. The reviewers (Diana and Meir Gillon) in the *Sunday Times* confessed that the book defied "the discipline of reviewers' word limits" and pointed out that it was "certainly an epic and could...have been a great novel. Even as it is, it remains a magnificent guide to India, and, for those who are prepared to work for their pleasure, a book to read and re-read". The reviewer in the *Times*, on the other hand, said succinctly: "It is rather as if the wisdom of Sanskrit had been done into story-book form...The writing is utterly beautiful. No other word will do".

To compare the small with the great (in terms of quality, that is, not of quantity), if *Kanthapura* is Raja Rao's *Ramayana*, then *The Serpent and the Rope* is his *Mahabharata*. If *Kanthapura* has a recognizable epic quality, *The Serpent and the Rope* is more than a miniature epic—it is almost encyclopaedic in its scope. The story-teller in *Kanthapura* is a brahmin widow, largely a creature of memory and tradition, and herself a character in the action, though a strictly minor one: her intellectual range is limited, though she can agreeably respond to new ideas and situations. The story-teller in *The Serpent and the Rope* is Rama (Ramaswamy), who is also the central character in the story he is trying to tell; he is at once sensitive and subtle, sensual and spiritual; he is a South Indian brahmin, a *smartha*, the eldest son of a Professor of Mathematics at Hyderabad; and he can proudly trace his lineage back to Madhwacharya (Vidyaranya), and far back indeed to Sage Yajnavalkya of the Upanishadic Age. "I wandered my life away, and became a holy vagabond", Rama says; he is variously described as a European brahmin, a

French Vedantin, the neo-Tristan and the pseudo-Satyavan. He had read the Upanishads at four, and knows Sanskrit very well; he knows his mother tongue, Kannada, and can quote Purandaradasa; and he knows English, having gone to school and college in India. In 1946, in his twenty-first year, he goes to France with a Government scholarship to pursue a course of research in European history, and meets at the University of Caen his future wife, Madeleine, a teacher of history and five years his senior in age:

Her hair was gold, and her skin for an Indian was like the unearthed marble with which we built our winter palaces. Cool, with the lake about one, and the peacock strutting in the garden below. The seventh-hour of music would come, and all the palace would see itself lit... Madeleine was like the Palace of Amber seen in moonlight.

They marry nearly three years later on 10 February 1949, and a child is born whom they first call Krishna, and later Pierre; but the child dies of broncho-pneumonia within a year of his birth. And Rama returns to India, hearing that his father is seriously ill, early in 1951. This is the point where the story may be said to start, and the 'events' of the next three years comprise the 'action' of the novel.

Rama's ancient moorings, like Moorthy's in *Kanthapura*, are in Malnad, his village being Hariharapura (it might be an 'alias' for Kanthapura) on the banks of the Himavathy and protected by the Goddess Kenchamma. Rama has a sense of 'belonging' to the living past which both caresses and possesses him:

Civilization is nothing but the familiarity with which we go into this inner property, cultivated and manured from age to age... Wars may have come and famine, the Muslims may have conquered us and after them the British, but there is a common area, an acknowledged land-holding, that is for ever ours, so that when we carry the harvest to our village temple, Kenchamma Herself knows we bring Her Herself—She Herself seen as the many, many. The gods that reside in us are of an ancient making...

Rama's aunt, Lakshamma, might be Akkayya's reincarnation; his mother Gauri (whom he lost early) might be the other

Gauri, cow and protectress and compassionate Mother. It is from his mother evidently that he has inherited his sensitiveness, his poetry, his spirituality, and also his delicacy of build and even his consumption, while his father has given the edge to his intellect and injected him with something of the fierce fanaticism of the mathematician. With his father's death soon after his return to India from France, Rama feels wholly orphaned. For the obsequies, Rama proceeds to Benares with his second step-mother ('Little Mother') and little step-brother, Sridhara. All roads in immortal India lead to holy Benares:

Benares is eternal. There the dead do not die nor the living live. The dead come down to play on the banks of the Ganges, and the living who move about, and even offer rice-balls to the manes, live in the illusion of a vast night and a bright city.

Ganges is the perennial river, falling on Shiva's head from heaven, and flowing across Bharat to the sea:

'Devi Sureshwari Bhagavathi Gange...'

Saviour of the three worlds of restless waves,

Clear is thy water circling upon the head of Shiva...

Going down the river Rama feels a pagan and senses his kinship with all the aeons of the past, his participation in one totality of experience which involves the past, the present and perhaps the future as well. Perhaps the Buddha once walked that way. Perhaps the Upanishadic Sages discussed there some "four, five or six thousand years ago...the roots of human understanding". The sight of the grave cows, of course, strikes a sympathetic chord within him, and he exclaims: "what wonderful animals these be in our sacred land—such maternal and ancient looks they have". From Benares Rama and Little Mother go to Allahabad,—to Triveni for the conclusion of the obsequies. On the way to Haridwar, the entire Gangetic plain overwhelms him as "one song of saintly sorrow" and he is filled with an ineffable rapture:

... Truth began where sorrow was accepted, and India began where Truth was acknowledged. So sorrow is our river, sorrow our earth, but the green of our trees and the white of our mountains is the affirmation that Truth is possible; that when the cycle of birth and

death are over, we can proclaim ourselves the Truth. Truth is the Himalaya, and Ganges humanity...

It is clear that Rama's four years' stay in Europe has helped him to realize in his heart of hearts what India,—with Himavanta and Ganga in the North and Kaveri and Kumari in the South,—really means to him. Whether in or out of India, he is of India, the Mother's son, and nothing can alter the fact.

A young man like Rama with antecedents like these cannot write like the simple sincere widow who tells *Kanthapura* after dusk to a stray visitor or group of visitors. Rama's mind is a seething whirlpool of cultural currents and cross-currents. An Indian and a brahmin, he has married a French girl, a Catholic; born in South India, he has mastered Sanskrit, some of the Indian regional languages, and English, to which he adds later mastery of French and, perhaps, Italian as well. His subject of research is the Albigenian or Cathar heresy, and more particularly the influence of Vedanta on Cathar philosophy. He is fascinated by Montsegur and Esclarmonde almost as much as by Benares and Gauri the Cow, and there are pages in the book where Rama seems possessed by the Cathars even as Hannah Closs is in her trilogy of novels on the Albigenian Heresy. Rama is dry-as-dust as well as poet, he is terribly introspective and can also be detached when necessary, and he is sensual at one moment and saintly at another. No wonder his way of telling his story makes demands on the reader, though there are not wanting rewards as well. Scraps from his diary mingle with narrative, dialogue (which sometimes reads like a catechism), description and reportage; he zig-zags disconcertingly in space and time, he mixes memory and reverie, he jostles recitation and speculation, he scatters with a seeming recklessness aphorisms, witticisms, cynicisms, scholarly jottings and gems of recapitulated song. Yet, in spite of all this riot of apparent irrelevance and irrepressible loquacity, everything—given, that is, the character, with the 'elements' so tantalizingly mixed in him—seems to fit perfectly.

As regards the 'action' of the story, it has a physical as well as a psychological side. The physical action has a superficial global sweep: Rama's travels take him to Benares, Allahabad,

Mussoorie, Delhi, Bombay; then to Aix-en-Provence, Montpalais, Pau, Cambridge, London; back again to Hyderabad, Bangalore, Hariharapura (his village), Kodaikanal, Madura, Bombay; and finally, to Aix-en-Provence, Oxford, London, Paris. He visits India in 1951 when his father dies, he revisits India next year to attend his sister Saroja's marriage, and, in 1954, towards the end of the novel, he plans to return to India a third time to work out his salvation in diligence. Such is the bare time-and-space framework of the physical action. Within it are a whole host of interesting characters—a truly cosmopolitan crowd comprising men and women drawn from India, France, England, Russia, Spain. Madeleine, Rama's wife, is a finely realized creation; and her drifting away from Rama—but towards Buddhism—is seen to be both natural and, under the circumstances, inevitable. Her headmistress says rightly of Madeleine: "This is the sister-soul of Simone Weil". Marrying the Hindu Brahmin, the French Catholic becomes an ardent Buddhist: how is one to explain this amazing alchemy? Madeleine experiences the glory and the agony of love and marriage and motherhood—and races beyond them through aspiration and asceticism to sainthood, or at least near-sainthood: yet she remains human and lovable and understanding till the last. The other triumph of characterization in the novel is Savithri. A rich jagirdar's daughter, she is affianced to a poor jagirdar in the civil service; she is in residence at Cambridge, she is one of the 'emancipated' girls who smoke and talk freely, and she even carries on a vague flirtation with Communism. The attraction between Savithri and Rama is obviously mutual, each has a catalytic effect upon the other, each grows upon the other's consciousness,—yet the impression is conveyed that it is a spiritual, rather than a physical, affinity that draws them together. There is a mystic or 'symbolic' marriage, too, but presently she goes back to India to marry her jagirdar (whom she does not love) and he returns to Madeleine at Aix-en-Provence. There is a third woman, too, in Rama's life: it is Sham Sunder's wife, Lakshmi, with whom Rama has a brief liaison at Bombay towards the fag end of his second visit to India. But he quickly disentangles himself from this adulterous relationship and takes the plane back to Aix and Madeleine. It is thus Rama who leaves Lakshmi,

as it is Madeleine who leaves Rama later on; but Savithri will neither have him nor leave him. They 'beat about the bush' an exasperating length of time—Rama is by turns Satyavan, Tristan and Krishna, and she is Satyavan's Savithri, Tristan's Iseult and Krishna's Radha—till at last they see that their love can have meaning only if it is securely grounded on a spiritual base. He makes her see that she must go back to her Pratap in India, and domesticity and fulfilment in marriage and motherhood. It is Rama's destiny to show the path to Madeleine, although half inadvertently; he can show the way to Savithri, though it causes a wrench to him; he can give solace to Little Mother and Saroja his sister; he can help Catherine, his wife's cousin, to find happiness with Georges. But how about *himself*? How is he to work out his own salvation? It is still on the *other* side, and he needs a bridge to cross over to it. "No, not a God but a Guru is what I need", he jots down in his diary on 5 April 1954. And so he decides to seek his Guru in Travancore. In some respects, Rama at the end of the story is the Hindu counterpart to Stavrogin at the end of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. Although Stavrogin shows the way to others—to Shatov, to Kirillov, to Pyotr Verhovensky—he is himself bare of all support in the end; love might perhaps save him still, but his "experiments with truth" have exhausted him, and he takes the surer way out of the mess—suicide. But Rama is the Hindu brahmin; to him the surer way would be—not what B. R. Rajam Iyer has called 'body-cide', the putting out of the body's life, but real suicide—the killing of the ego, the ending of the illusion of individuality. And so Rama seeks out his Guru.

If such be the physical action (and even here the spirit intrudes again and again), the psychological action is far more important and takes place really in the theatre of Rama's heart, mind and soul. We see places, men and phenomena as Rama sees them, we see the world and its movements as they are reflected in the mirror of his sensibility, we peer into the crater that is his mind at times, and we gaze—at rare moments—at the still depths of his soul, its vast sufficiency and total strength. So far as the novel is concerned, Rama is the reality, the rest is illusion; we may go further even and say that Raja Rao is the reality, and Rama and Madeleine and Savithri, Uncle Seetha-

ramu and Oncle Charles, Lezo the Spanish philologist and Georges the Russian theologian and Robin-Bessaignac the professor at the Sorbonne are all but the serpent, the glamour of the novelist's maya! There is, of course, a sort of sociological—or, shall we say, an East-West—problem posed in the book: Can the marriage of a Hindu with a French girl succeed? Can the pulls of tradition and modernity be purposively reconciled? Suppose, however, these problems are themselves but the serpent! These are not the real problems: the real problem is, not establishing harmony without, or with another, but within, with oneself. All problems are, in the final analysis, really spiritual problems. Yet it is true that the phenomenal world—the serpent—cannot be easily conjured away. We are caught in the interstices of Maya's net, *samsara's* bondage, one way or another, and time and again. We wriggle but we cannot easily break through. In one of the most brilliantly sustained passages of philosophical frenzy in the book, Rama tells Madeleine:

The world is either unreal or real—the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two—and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood. . . . And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradise, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes. For wherever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. Whether you call it duality or modified duality, you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent—you are—the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, 'Ayyo!' 'Oh! It's the serpent!' You run and roll and lament, and have compassion for fear of pain, others' and your own. You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. One—The Guru—brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars. 'It's only the rope'. He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and *know* there never was a serpent. . .

The truth, the ultimate or the only truth, may be the rope, the rope only, but the Guru is yet to come with the Lantern, and hence the immediate experience is that of the serpent with its speckled bands and seductive scales, its dreaded movements and imagined hisses. Pain and sorrow and ugliness are here, and disease and decay and death. Like Prince Muishkin's epilepsy, Rama's consumption too is a symptom of his extraordi-

nariness, of his spiritual anguish and exultations. And Rama's mind is large and contains whole continents of diverse experiences. Saroja's marriage at Hyderabad and the Queen's coronation at London, researches into the origins of Cathar philosophy and speculations about Communism and Fascism, descent into the deepest of Hell's circles and ascent into Paradise—all come within the range of Rama's consciousness. Raja Rao's novel is almost an *olla podrida* of cultural odds and ends; a conference of scholars, eccentrics and Vedantins; a non-stop philosophical seminar; a ventriloquist's show—or whatever else you please. Sometimes the argument makes a series of quick leaps which merely dazzle and confuse:

...Mephistopheles was a solipsist. Lenin was a Saint-Francis turned inquisitor. If I were not a royalist, I should have become a communist. After all Stalin was an usurper, a Cesarevitch who *succeeded* Rasputin. Ivan Karamazov was a fine disciple of Christ—and enemy of the inquisition. Alyosha was a true Christian. When the Mother of God replaced the Son of Man Catholicism became a universal religion...

...India has, I always repeat, no history. To integrate India into history—is like trying to marry Madeleine. It may be sincere, but it is not history. History, if anything, is the acceptance of human sincerity. But Truth transcends sincerity; Truth is *in* sincerity and *in* insincerity—beyond both. And *that* again is India...

Yet Raja Rao's prose can also have a poised brevity, an incandescent sufficiency, as in this sentence about Savithri: "Her presence never said anything, but her absence spoke"; and even his rhapsodies can ring almost true and open vistas of light, as in this paean in praise of Woman:

Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulations of space, the knowing in knowledge; the woman is fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, act... Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the gods, inheritance; the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe . . . The world was made for celebration, for coronation, and indeed even

when the king is crowned it is the Queen to whom the Kingdom comes...for even when it is a King that rules, she is the justice, the bender of man in compassion, the confusion of kindness, the sorrowing in the anguish of all...

A whirl of words merely, even as music is a whirl of sounds—it might be Madura Mani Ayyar playing with 'swaras' and projecting a cataract of music; and in describing the frenzy of love—as in Rama's diary for 5 November 1951—Raja Rao turns sensuality itself into glowing prose. Although woman, love, sensuality, rhetoric, poetry, all are but the deceptive mirage of non-existence, the fascinating and fearful serpent,—not the clear Pool of Vishnu, not the harmless real that is the Rope,—yet this lie of illusion seems more vivid and real than the truth of reality.

Of course, Raja Rao (or his hero, Rama) is apt to talk too much—ride his hobby-horses to death; and, exasperated, we feel like saying with Madeleine:

Sometimes, Rama, I want to run away from you, run far away from you, just to listen to stupid innocent laughter...or go to a circus and see the clown make everyone laugh—this high seriousness reminds me of poor Werther...

Yet, grumble though we may, we do not actually run away from the book; we feel we must go on and on, marking the writhings and rhythmic movements of the serpent, watching the head chasing the tail to know whether it is the serpent or the rope, and noting the alternations in elation and discomfiture. Never before has the subtle and tortuous mind of the cultivated Indian who is caught in the narrows of the ambiguous agonizing present—the junction of the old and the new, the East and the West—been presented so engagingly and excitingly in a work of fiction. In one of his sudden transitions, Rama describes the novel as "the sad and uneven chronicle of a life, my life" with no art or decoration, but with the 'objectivity', the discipline of the 'historical sciences'; it is an attempt really to make the imponderables of 'inner' life seem reasonably logical and concrete; and it is, besides, an attempt—a bold, adroit, sustained attempt—to set the English language to a prolonged arti-

culatation of Indian—or Sanskritic—modes of thought and speech. At the very least, *The Serpent and the Rope* is an ambitious and meritorious effort at achieving a total projection of India in vivid fictional terms; and, perhaps, it is the most impressive novel yet written by an Indian in English.

The Serpent and the Rope has been followed by a novel of slender bulk, *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965). "I wanted to publish the book", Raja Rao wrote to a correspondent, "with about 300 blank pages at the end, to show that the real book is five hundred and odd pages, and the reader must fill in the vacant spaces". Here's a role for the reader,—the reader as collaborator! And Raja Rao further invites the reader "to weep at every page, not for what he sees, but for what he sees he sees. For me it's like a book of prayer". It is also, if you please, "a metaphysical comedy". The reader has to infer a great deal between the lines, he has to weep and laugh at once and all the time; and he has to lose himself in prayer, he has to learn to cease to be himself and become "what he sees he sees." Altogether it is asking too much of the average reader who is always in a hurry, the reader who looks only for a story—and for some excitement and/or entertainment—in a novel. But, then, the reader—however busy or superficial he may be—will find these too, story, excitement, and entertainment, in *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

The novel seems to have grown out of the short story, *The Cat*, which appeared in the *Chelsea Review* of New York in 1959.¹ The 'Shakespeare' of the title is a latter addition. The 'cat' is very much of a character in the novel, almost *the* character, and she is very much of a symbol too. But how about 'Shakespeare'? Many explanations have been offered, none entirely satisfactory. It is enough, perhaps, to say that a Shakespearian ambience interpenetrates the warp and woof of the novel, as evidenced in its catholicity, language and poetry.

There is not much of a story, however. The narrator is Ramakrishna Pai, a clerk who lives away from his wife, and has a liaison with the school-mistress, Shantha. Pai's neighbour,

¹ M. K. Naik, 'The Kingdom of God is within a "Mew": A Study of *The Cat and Shakespeare*' (Karnatak University Journal, Vol. XII, 1968), p. 123.

Govindan Nair, is a clerk too, but in the Ration Office; his speech is "a mixture of *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Shakespeare. The words are choice, the choice of the situation clumsy... He must twist a thing into its essence and spread it out". He is, in other words, humorist, humanist and comic metaphysician. Cats and kittens are the currency of Govindan Nair's talk:

Have you ever seen a kitten fall? You could fall. I could fall. But the kittens walk on the wall. They are so deft. They are so young. They are so white. The mother cat watches them. And when they are about to fall, there she is, her head in the air, and she picks you up by the scruff of your neck. You never know where she is. (Who has seen her? Nobody has.) To know where she is, you have to be mother's mother. And how could that ever be? Mother, I worship you...

We all do stumble, the cleverest and the nimblest of us do; but had we the total trust of the kitten in the mother cat, our stumbling wouldn't matter, for we would be arrested half-way in our stumbling and jerked away to a haven of safety. This is the higher wisdom, *parāvidya*.

But our everyday life has to be lived in this goodly world that is a prison, a prison like Denmark; at least we have to make terms with our ration shop! Now Shakespeare, not only knew all about Denmark, he knew all about the ration shop too:

Shakespeare knew every mystery of the ration shop. Here however we haven't to murder a brother to marry his wife. Here we marry whom we like. The ration card marries. You are married even when there is no wife. You are married without looking at horoscopes. The dead are not buried in ration shops. There will be no grave scene...

But why bother? Once we have learnt the way of the kitten, we are saved; once we know that there is a soul within and Grace above, nothing can really touch us. For the rest, well, let's play the game as best we can; the ration shop, the revenue office, the court house—they will somehow sort themselves out. There's no point in worrying, no virtue in running the rat-race like everybody else, no sense at all in getting too deeply involved in the hucksterings of the market-place.

The 'action' of the novel meanders through the haze of

Govindan Nair's moods and words, his unpredictable actions and reactions. He is arrested on a charge of bribery, but the cat's wordless evidence saves him. As for Ramakrishna Pai, he has Shantha's love, and she helps him to get a house too (though not a three-storeyed one). And it is the cat that leads him to the threshold of the beatific vision:

I saw nose (not the nose) and eyes seeing eyes seeing, I saw ears curved to make sound visible, and face and limbs rising in perfection of perfection for form was it. I saw love yet knew not its name but heard it as sound, I saw truth not as fact but as ignition. I could walk into fire and be cool, I could sing and be silent, I could hold myself and not be there. I saw feet. They made flowers on stems and the curved hands of children. I smelt a breath that was of nowhere but rising in my nostrils sank back into me, and found death was at my door. I woke up and found death had passed by, telling me I had no business to be there. Then where was I? Death said it had died. I had killed death, when you see death as death, you kill it...I remain over, having killed myself.

The ego being dead, the Self is for ever. The way of the kitten has led perplexed Ramakrishna to the vision splendid of divine perfection and harmony and bliss. It is Bhoothalingam the man of little faith that comes to grief, for the cat jumps on his head and he dies of a weak heart.

The Cat and Shakespeare seems to have baffled the critics, and no wonder: 'all too chatty and catty'; 'illusory non-plot'; Raja Rao is caricaturing himself; a perfect mouse-trap; who can say what's happening and what's nonhappening? The novel does tease the reader's understanding to test whether he is capable of beyonding mere intellectual comprehension and losing himself in the silences between Govindan Nair's speeches. Raja Rao is said to have remarked that *The Cat and Shakespeare* "is substantially based on certain events in real life", and that the novel is a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope*. There is one other clue, provided by the author himself; in an interview published in the *Illustrated Weekly* in January 1964, Raja Rao said: "For me literature is *sadhana*—not a profession but a vocation". This was so even when he wrote *Kanthapura*, "but I was then a confused and lost person. And that was why I gave up writing for a long time". Then, after he had met his guru Sri Atmananda,

he wrote *The Serpent and the Rope* in 1955-56. Two years later he wrote *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

Clearly, then, *The Cat and Shakespeare* is not mere fantasy, for it is admittedly based on actual events. It is a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope*. And all his writing is part of Raja Rao's *sadhana* or spiritual experience, and so *Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat* should be viewed as steps—or paths—towards realization. If *Kanthapura* could be described as a *purana*, as a *Gandhi Purana*, and *The Serpent and the Rope* as an epic, a mini-Mahabharata in the idiom of our age, then *The Cat and Shakespeare* is more like one of the longer Upanishads, part narrative, part speculation, and part dialogue or discussion. Here the description zigzags rather than progresses straight on, the speculation is not so much analytical as a series of spasmodic lightning flashes, and the dialogue is dialectical rather than an exchange of confidences:

'Where does water come from?'
'From the tap.'
'And the water in the tap?'
'From the lake.'
'And the water in the lake?'
'From the sky.'
'And the water in the sky?'
'From the ocean.'
'And the water in the ocean?'
'From the rivers.'
'And the river waters?'
'They make the lakes.'
'And the tap water?'
'Is river water.'
'And so?'
'Water comes from water.'

Words, words, words; yet the Word is *sabdabrahman* too, and the Word is behind the words. 'How can a judge know the truth?' 'By being it!' It is "the light from the ceiling—a sunbeam, in fact" that pierces through the paper and reveals to the court the hidden signature behind the superficial one. Unless the light from *within*, a beam from the inner Sun, lights up the words with understanding, their true meaning will not reveal itself. The silences are more important than the spoken words, the vacant

spaces in the book are more significant than the printed pages! This is seeing, not what is seen, but what is to be seen. Upanishadic illumination is a matter of lightning flashes, not the steady light of day. Hence the shortness of *The Cat and Shakespeare*; hence too its impact on us, which is akin to a cloudy day rent by lightning.

If Raja Rao has moved from the *Puranic* 'form' to the *ithihasic*, and from the *ithihasic* to the *Upanishadic*, there has been a parallel movement too: from *karma* in *Kanthapura* to *jnana* in *The Serpent and the Rope*, and on to *bhakti-prapatti* in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Moorthy is a man of action, and realization comes to him through political action, Gandhian satyagraha. Rama (Ramaswamy) is a scholar, an intellectual, a metaphysician; realization can come to him only through *jnana*, and it is the Guru that will make Rama see that the *one* alone remains, the many merely change and pass. When the neophyte cries distraught "ayyo! oh! it's the serpent!", the Guru brings the lantern, lets the light fall on the ground, and says reassuringly: "It's only the rope!" But Govindan Nair is no intellectual; he is intelligent, but he is no intellectual, he is no metaphysician. Neither is Ramakrishna Pai. They are like you or me, they are common humanity; but equally with Moorthy or Rama, they too hanker after fulfilment. For them, the path of devotion (*bhakti*) and the path of surrender (*prapatti*)—one shades off into the other—is best; following this path, one cannot possibly miss one's goal.

Moorthy derives inspiration from the Mahatma, and is sustained in his work by his own aspiration and the discipline of his life. Rama realizes he has to do all by himself, though of course the Guru he seeks may give him the clue to get out of the labyrinthine *maya* of phenomenal existence and have "*Atma Darshan*—at the Ultimate". But for Govindan Nair, faith and surrender, or surrender born of faith, is enough; it would bring about instantaneous "*Atma-Nivritti*—Freedom and Felicity in the Self". The movement of surrender is the moment of acceptance and safety. In the spiritual as in the physical world, action and reaction are equal and opposite. The movement towards the Mother is met by the movement of the Mother. He who chooses the Divine has been chosen by the Divine. "I like being the

kitten. And how about you, Sir?" Ramakrishna too learns to be a kitten in the end. Or, shall we say, Rama? Ramaswamy went to the Guru to be initiated into Advaitic realization. But the Guru, perhaps, taught him the easier, the more infallible way. No use crying frantically "ayyo! ayyo!"; better "meow-meow" trustingly! The Mother will hear, and all will be well. It is in this sense that *The Cat* is a sequel to *The Serpent*; and *Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* make a trilogy, and present a steady progression in Raja Rao's *sadhana*. Also, *The Cat* is a 'metaphysical comedy', even as Dante's *Paradise* is the conclusion of his *Divine Comedy*. If there are glimpses of Inferno's circles and Purgatory's slopes in *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* respectively, in *The Cat and Shakespeare* we are whirled by winged words and shown the 'death of death' and the efflorescence of the perfect perfection of Love, Truth and Harmony.

Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar

Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya's five novels—*So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) and *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966)—form rather an impressive achievement. He has been a freelance writer, and some of his vivid historical sketches were published as *Indian Cavalcade: Some Memorable Yesterdays* in 1942. He has travelled widely, and he is a much translated novelist. The Sahitya Akademi award to him in 1967 was a fitting recognition of his standing and achievement in the field of Indian fiction in English.

His first novel, *So Many Hungers*, was published in October 1947, soon after the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan, but it actually covers the war years with their uncertainties, privations, agonies, cruelties, frustrations. The foreground is occupied partly by the Basu family, and partly by the peasant family, the girl Kajoji, her mother, her brother. Albeit carefully individualized, these are but algebraic symbols jostled into an expression of the plight of humanity in Calcutta, in Bengal, in India. Samarendra Basu conceives the idea of organizing the concern, *Bengal Rice Limited*, while the more ruthless and unscrupulous Sir Lakshminath engineers the Company's extending its tentacles to every remote corner of the Province: "it was this man's hand that had spread well the grease of corruption to win the Company great privileges; more, it was his organizing genius that had solved the intricate problem of storing the vast accumulated foodgrains—secret dumps lay in the heart of the famine areas".

The novel really (as the title forcefully proclaims) unfolds the story of a largely man-made hunger that took a toll of two

million innocent men, women and children in Calcutta and Bengal. While the hoarders, profiteers and blacketeers plied a thundering trade, authority was apathetic, the wells of human pity seemed to have almost dried up, and only the jackals and the vultures were in vigorous and jubilant action. The novelist paints the naked horror of it all with a pitiless precision and cumulative detail. The war was evil, and had made Government blindly fiendish in its operations: "They had scorched the boats. They had scorched the food. They would scorch the people". The passing of the 'Quit India' resolution in August 1942, followed by the mass arrest of leaders, led to a convulsion without a parallel, and this gave the last vicious twist to the Bengal tragedy which, of a sudden, burst its tenuous bonds and became a nightmarish drama of general disintegration. While Samarendra and Lakshminath and their like were making money faster and faster, and exploring new ways of sensuality, Samarendra's son, Rahaoul, tried to engage in relief work and his other son Kunal entered the army. The accredited leaders of the people were in jail, 'underground' workers often made confusion the more confounded, and the common people of course had the worst of everything, lacking food and clothing, and going without relief or even the hope of it:

Forty thousand country boats wantonly destroyed. Many villages evacuated. The uprooted people pauperised. Inflated currency, the spine of war finance, added the finishing touch, eating up the people's purchasing power, reducing the small savings of a lifetime to a fifth of their worth. Nothing was left of the foundations of life . . .

...Vultures perched on the trees, vultures wheeled or hung poised in the sunlight air...

Corpses lay by the road, huddled together. Picked to the bones, with eyeless caverns of sockets, bits of skin and flesh rotting on nose and chin and ribs, the skulls pecked open, only the hair uneaten . . . A family group had sunk into sleep; and beyond the sleep—vultures . . . Heaven's scavengers. Save for them the air of Bengal would be putrid with the rotting flesh of man. Fellow human beings had ceased to care for the living; how could they care for the dead?

Bhattacharya's lacerating descriptions would be inartistic were they not touched by compassion, and it is to his credit that his writing insinuates throughout the pity of it all. People's follies

are greater than their crimes, and we sin because we are blind. *So Many Hungers* is no doubt an impeachment of man's inhumanity to man, but it is also a dramatic study of a set of human beings trapped in a unique tragic predicament.

In his second novel, *Music for Mohini*, Bhattacharya tells the story of a Calcutta-born Brahmin girl, Mohini, a popular radio artiste, who is married to Jayadev, a scholar and a writer with his roots in his village, Behula. Jayadev's sister, Roop-lekha, tells Mohini soon after marriage: "You are city-bred, village-wed. I am village-bred, city-wed. We share one common lot; we've been pulled up by the roots". When Roop-lekha went to live with her husband in the city, she had to stand the critical stare of the sophisticated; she had to give up her old modesty, she had to eat fish and meat—"though at first the smell and taste sickened me". With Mohini, it has to be the other way about; she has to learn to countrify and traditionalize herself, attune herself to the atmosphere of her husband's village and its Big House. "Why all this bother?" asks Mohini; if city is city and country is country, why try the impossible task of trying to make them meet? But Roop-lekha has her answer:

We who're so wed serve some real purpose. It's as though we made a bridge between two banks of a river. We connect culture with culture, Mohini, our old Eastern view of life with the new semi-Western outlook...

That is all very well, of course, but the process of adjustment is not easy in the best of circumstances, and with Mohini there are certain complicating factors as well. Her widowed mother-in-law is anxious, and even impatient, that Mohini should bear a son, partly because that is a very natural desire, and partly because (according to astrology) the longevity of Jayadev is bound up with his becoming a father within a specified time. A further complicating factor is Sudha, a beautiful and intelligent girl with a grievance of her own, for had the lines on her hand been slightly different, she might herself have married Jayadev. But now Mohini is the proud mistress of Big House, and no wonder "Sudha's brooding jealousy had a razor's edge; her wounded ego had made her cruel". Between Jayadev and

Mohini, there fall these shadows—the perversity of the stars, the obsession of a mother, the fierce resentment of Sudha.

Out of the clash between the old and the new, the seeming antagonism between the country and the city, a creative new synthesis has to emerge. The old is not necessarily all gold, the exciting and the new needn't be always good; and music is a matter of harmonizing different notes, and there will be no 'music for Mohini' till her heart-beats chime with Jayadev's. At first he is almost opaque to her:

The dark spaces between a man and woman have to be lit with sympathy and comprehension. Reveal thyself! her eyes begged. She was bewildered. She needed more, oh, much more of him than he gave. She ached to know all that he was, all that he had been... What is your work, your dream of glory, scholar of scholars? I know so little of you.

But little by little they grow in mutual understanding; Jayadev tells his wife: she could be more than a mere wife, she could be his Maitreyi, not in the intellectual field perhaps, but certainly "on the more dynamic path of action". Let Mohini take in hand the education of the illiterate women of Behula! Already Jayadev has been able to persuade Harindra, a brilliant young surgeon—"He belongs to our village but has been away for years"—to return to Behula and minister to the people's health. Thus they could all work together as a band of practical idealists and make Behula a model village, and an example for all Bengal.

For Mohini, it is not the easy pampered life that a rich man's wife may be expected to lead, but rather a life full of challenges and opportunities and difficulties. Her husband has "vested her with high responsibility, lifted her to a pedestal... How could she fail him? In the great task ahead she would play her part. She would be his true partner in feeling, in faith and in dream". She throws herself into the new tasks, and she strikes roots into the soil of Behula. The strain is nothing, what matters is the sense of fulfilment alone! But while she is thus able to establish rapport with her husband by readily furthering the causes so dear to him, she finds it far more difficult to abide by the imperatives of her mother-in-law's old-world, superstitious faith.

To lift the curse of supposed barrenness, Mohini is advised to offer a little of her heart's blood in the lotus-leaf bowl to the Virgin Goddess. At first Mohini is shocked, she is furious,—but she is also afraid. Presently she comes to see that the mother-in-law isn't all that bad, only misguided; "perhaps she saw the wrong side of this old tapestry of tradition and missed the design!" There is now a sudden transition from hatred to love, and Mohini decides to let her mother-in-law have her own way. But before the actual event, Jayadev gets wind of the affair, and he is deeply disturbed:

What, he wondered, had happened to the ancient quest of the Hindus, the quest for *satyam*, *sivam*, *sundaram*—Truth, Goodness and Beauty? The core, the spiritual content had been choked by centuries of evil overgrowth. Misguided faith burned like a great lamp of oil that gave little light but a great deal of smoke. It was this smoke that was pouring over India, this smoke which made the Big House stifling...

Jayadev reached the temple of the Virgin Goddess in time to stop the ceremonial offering of blood. The mother-son confrontation is the climactic point in the novel, but Jayadev wins, and the ghosts of the past reluctantly recede. In her misery and humiliation, the mother concocts a foolish and ugly scheme to safeguard (as she thinks) Jayadev's life. But it is found that there is no need to put the scheme into effect, for Mohini is with child, after all, and her life is a throb of music made up of divers notes; and she feels fulfilled. And even Sudha, although a prisoner of discord now, might yet find her own music in Harindra the young idealistic surgeon.

Bhattacharya's third novel, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, reverts to the theme of the Bengal hungers. From Behula we are back in Calcutta. The tempo of life in this most populous of Indian cities—the complex of urban vices and the thin veneer of urban sophistication, the pressure of mass movements and mass hysteria, the reign of superstition and mumbo jumbo—gives the novel an eerie and piquant quality all its own. Less sombre in its hues than *So Many Hungers*, the indictment it carries is delivered with more deftness, and satire and entertainment are mixed in almost equal proportion. Kalo the blacksmith, driven

by hunger to Calcutta, is jailed for a while, and becomes a pimp to eke out a miserable livelihood. Now he finds that his only daughter, Lekha, has herself been lured to one of the harlot-houses in his range. Although he saves her just in time, his eyes being now opened to the sordidness of the game, he declares war on society and resolves to be revenged on its pillars for the famine they have caused and the harlot-houses they have kept flourishing. He metamorphoses himself into Mangal Adhikari the brahmin and encompasses a 'miracle': a stone Shiva rising from the ground! On this adroitly contrived feat, he builds up a structure of popular faith, and the collusion of half-lie and half-fraud pays rich dividends. He is delighted, he is almost exultant:

The turn of the Wheel favours us beyond all reckoning... They're paying. They touch our low-caste feet. They pray to a god who is no god. What expiation could ever cleanse their souls? They're polluted, fallen... Yesterday a man came and touched my feet humbly. Lekha, he was no other than the magistrate who sent me to prison, the magistrate who asked, 'Why do you have to live? Why does your daughter have to live?'

Among the devotees are jute merchants and rice profiteers, and the rich and influential Sir Abalabandhu is a variation of Sir Lakshminath of the earlier novel. The action moves on the two levels of satire and comedy with sinister links and strange vicissitudes. There is the milk crisis, for example. Buckets of milk donated by the devotees are used for the idol's bath and then cast into the river Ganga. It is only after a show of sweet reasonableness and necessary strength that Kalo is permitted at last by the donors to divert the milk, after the holy bath is over, to feed hungry children. One way or the other, the fraud has to be kept going, and like the man riding a tiger, Kalo knows not how or when to stop. Lekha becomes the Mother of the Sevenfold Bliss and becomes the object of adoration. There are complications of all kinds, and both father and daughter are increasingly ill at ease. At long last, "a sudden force" takes hold of Kalo the blacksmith turned Mangal the brahmin. He decides to tell the whole truth to the assembled concourse of brahmins, banias, devotees, sightseers and stragglers. The audi-

ence is stingingly taken aback: they cry, 'The rogue! The *shaitan*! Beat him up. Break every bone in his carcass!' But Sir Abalabandhu can only look at the other side of the medal: "Marvelous!...What business sense! What method! Why aren't there one or two men like the blacksmith in my office?" For Lekha herself it is a great relief. She has been feeling that, just as the harlot-house had tried to pollute her body, this fraudulent temple has been working "inside her, spreading corruption". As for Kalo, he the 'low-caste' has taken more than his full revenge on the people who had lorded it over being puffed up with 'caste and cash'; and now he and Lekha, having cut themselves loose from their entanglements and deceptions, are content to begin life anew, purged of the past completely and not despairing of the future.

Bhattacharya's next novel, *A Goddess Named Gold*, has its affiliations with both *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*, but it is by no means a repetition of either. Actually, *A Goddess Named Gold* signifies an advance in Bhattacharya's art as a novelist, for the 'axes' here are hardly visible and the grinding is not very audible. Also, the novel derives from Bhattacharya's earlier short story, 'Desperate Women'. In this story, Lachmi's child, Nago, slips into the well, and is saved by the brave resourceful Meera Bai; the women now demonstrate before the local profiteer (who is also Lachmi's husband) and compel him to release the hoarded *saris* for sale, and the excited women cry: *Lachmi Bai ki jai!* The novel begins with this episode of the rescue of the child and the sale of the *saris*. Lachmi reappears as Lakshmi, Meera Bai becomes Meera, and they (along with four others) become the 'Cowhouse Five' (defying arithmetic). There is also Meera's grandmother, and there is a roving grandfather, who is referred to as the 'minstrel'. Lakshmi's husband is Seth Samsundarji, whose pursuit of wealth and power at any cost comes in conflict at various points with the minstrel's half-mystic half-realistic Sarvodaya ideals. The obtrusive Seth and the elusive minstrel between them effectively polarize the action of the novel, while the pure, brave, unspoilt, unselfish but adventurous Meera is poised between the two, now an unconscious instrument for evil, now a conscious instrument for good.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Kalo and Lekha bamboozle the crowd into worshipping the spurious *linga*. The situation in *A Goddess Named Gold* is rather more complex. The minstrel gives a *taveez* to Meera, and tells her that it would prove a touchstone and turn copper into gold every time she did an act of pure kindness. Owing to a misunderstanding, the egregious Seth thinks (and so does the innocent Meera) that the *taveez* does really have this alchemic power, and so he enters into a business deal with her on a fifty-fifty basis. Yet the situation is not without its difficulties:

He (the Seth) had been straining to get to the root of the problem—what is real kindness? The idea came at last that kindness had to be a natural impulse. Contrived, deliberate, it lost all value. Kindness could not be resolved into a human deal. It was a matter of the heart...Neither purpose nor gesture could by itself avail. The act had to be done, the selfless, spontaneous act of real kindness.

How vastly comic that the hardened profiteer and blacketeer should explore the nature of 'kindness' and try to promote 'selfless, spontaneous' acts of kindness? The situation as it develops becomes more and more comic, and even farcical, till at last Meera casts away the *taveez* into the river. The minstrel is opportunely back, and it is the threshold of freedom; and he tells the people that, not the *taveez*, but 'freedom', is the real touchstone:

It was a touchstone for everyone. To possess this touchstone was not enough, for it could wake to life and work its miracle only when acts of faith were done...Without acts of faith, freedom is a dead pebble tied to the arm with a bit of string, fit only to be cast into the river.

Described as "a modern fable of India at the time of Independence", *A Goddess Named Gold* has a cathartic quality that sets it apart from many novels that merely entertain. Our prototypical Seth Samsundarji finds precedent for his profiteering activities in the wartime orgies of cornering the market: "...during the rice famine in Bengal four years before...three million men and women had to die so that there could be thirty new millionaires, and none condemned the profiteers.

His present role, set beside theirs, was a child's prank". If the Sethjis and permit-holders and license-hunters and quota-seekers are not going to be effectively contained, we shall have many more hungers again, thirty million more hungers. India's freedom is like the *taveez* on Meera's hand; there are Sethjis, profiteers, political bosses, civilian Bulaki Raos, foreign financial interests and local subversionists who try to strike infamous business deals with freedom, even as Samsundarji tries to with Meera's touchstone. Freedom itself will be mere dead sea fruit if the beneficiaries of freedom prove incapable of "acts of faith", if idealism scuttles itself, if the glittering case of gold dries up the sap of humanity within, if power divorces itself from Grace and destroys love. *A Goddess Named Gold* entertains as a story, but it also disturbs us with its undertones of warning and prophecy. Sonamitti (where the 'action' takes place) is everywhere, for gold and wealth are pouring on us in abundance; Meera the compassionate mother is ready with her gold and her wealth; and yet it is not this gold and wealth,—not even the priceless gift of freedom,—but what we are going to do with it all that will determine our and mankind's future.

In his most recent novel, *Shadow from Ladakh*, Bhattacharya has a challenging theme: India at the time of the Chinese invasion of 1962. The title itself sets the pace of the writing, and the military situation casts its shadow almost everywhere. Whole phrases and sentences read like excerpts from the reports of political or military correspondents:

In slow stages they (the Chinese) had surreptitiously annexed sixteen thousand square miles of territory that had been an integral part of India. Their claims were mounting still...

...news had just come that Chinese armed forces have encircled our checkpoint in Galwan Valley...

While the pass at a height of fifteen thousand feet was subjected to a fierce frontal assault, a strong column took a secret jungle route and outflanked the defending garrison...

Words and snatches from Gandhiji's or Nehru's speeches—recapitulations of recent Indian and world history—help to evoke the appropriate historical background; the main characters in the novel tend to merge with the figures of history; and types,

symbols, myths and individuals mingle and fuse to throw us off our guard.

If the whole action of the novel is something of a shadow-play cast by the Chinese peril, many of the characters are shadows too—shadows chasing shadows. Satyajit is Gandhi's shadow (or a Gandhian echo), and Bhasker, the Chief Engineer of Steeltown, is almost a Nehruistic symbol or shadow. Satyajit's Gandhigram is distantly patterned after Gandhiji's Sevagram, and Bhasker's Steeltown could likewise be one of the dream-edifices of Nehru, one of the 'new temples' in the secular India of Nehru's imagination. Gandhi or Nehru?—recalling the earlier American dilemma, Jefferson or Hamilton? Is peaceful co-existence possible between Steeltown with its blast furnaces and Gandhigram with its spinning wheels? Again, there was China, Mao's China. Was peaceful co-existence possible between Mao's armour-plated expansionist absolutist China and Nehru's democratic-socialist federal republic? The political militarist confrontation was instinct with explosive possibilities. And the spiritual confrontation was of even greater consequence than the other. Mao's China trying to annex India, Steeltown trying to swallow up Gandhigram,—and this was no matter of conquering square miles alone "but a way of life, an inner spirit".

The plotting of the novel is structured out of contrasting situations, images and symbols. Mao's China and Nehru's India: danger to Ladakh and Nefa, and danger to Gandhigram: Meadow House in Steeltown, Mud Hall in Gandhigram: water-cooler here, earthen-pot there: the writ of New Delhi, and Satyajit's "fast unto death". And even the two girls in Bhasker's life—Rupa and Sumita—are compared to the turbine and the spinning wheel respectively, the India to be and the India of the epic age!

The confrontations are sharp enough, and are ranged at various levels, but where is the resolution of the conflict, even the possibility of it? Satyajit and his wife, Suruchi, had come under the influence, first of Tagore and Shantiniketan, and later of Gandhi and Sevagram. These influences have not been wholly harmonized. Bhasker too is not all Pittsburgh and Steeltown and ruthlessness: he can play the flute; he loses his heart to

the children of a Chinese alien; he can soften and yield. There is a Satyajit in Bhasker, and a Bhasker in Satyajit,—not on the surface but deep within. Does Gandhigram symbolize the past (the epic age)—or the future? Does Steeltown portend death—or new life? What will be the issue of the confrontation between Steeltown and Gandhigram,—or between China and India? Can the tiger and the deer live together, enacting fellowship and harmony?

Bhasker and Satyajit take extreme positions, but patient sufferance is Suruchi's badge, as it was Kasturba's. It is Sumita—so very close to Satyajit being his daughter, and so much drawn irresistibly towards Bhasker whom she loves—that serves as the link. Even as the wonders of technological change inflame his imagination, Bhasker is not quite unaware of the dangers of such 'progress':

India needed the big machines, not spinning wheels. Change, not tradition. Not the heritage of philosophic inanity, but the dynamism of technological progress even with all its inevitable chaos. Yet—all that could be oversimplification...He knew the pattern and all the other patterns in Steeltown—at every level. Section Twelve longing to be Eleven. Insatiety, frustration, intrigue, graft...

What are the alternatives, then? Put the clock back, or march headlong towards the abyss? Isn't there a third, and sane, way as well? Isn't a 'conscious amalgam' of the two opposing ways of thinking and living capable of realization?

No trite answer is possible. Bhattacharya's answer is Sumita, who is moulded in her father's image and will yet marry Bhasker. She will bring Gandhigram and Steeltown together! But Sumita is, after all, only a novelist's creation, the image of his faith and hope. She is a flower that one hopes will blossom in the deserts of contemporary hate and disillusion. Again, if Sumita can bring Steeltown and Gandhigram together, cannot the same force of love bring together China and India as well? The five little Chinese girls who worship the framed oleograph of Mao undergo a change of heart in the course of a few days and go down in a row before Bhasker in a gesture of leave-taking—"eyes closed . . . and each pair of joined palms held flowers". It is but fancy again, — a poet's fancy, — yet why

should this not hold the key to the future, if there's to be a future at all?

In this as in his other novels, Bhattacharya has his 'axes' to grind, but the novel doesn't suffer seriously on their account. There is some exercise in whimsy in the matrimonial advertisement and its consequences, and there is pointed satire in the description of the visit of the Deputy Minister to Steeltown, the stir among the 'society ladies', and the ceremonial offer of trinkets to the Defence Fund. The satirical and humorous sketches entertain us in due measure, the backdrop of history makes us sad and serious by turns, but it is the human action that involves us in its intricacies and ramifications. *Shadow from Ladakh* takes us to the heart of the darkness, and also points to the dim beckoning light at the far, far end of the tunnel.

In quick succession, and without repeating himself, Mr. Manohar Malgonkar has published four novels in the course of five years. The first, *Distant Drum*, appeared in 1960, and the fourth, *A Bend in the Ganges*, in 1964. Taken together, these novels constitute no mean achievement. There is a certain maturity about them, and in plotting as well as in telling his stories he displays an ability that compels recognition.

In *Distant Drum*, there is an attempt to present aspects of army life in India during the period of transition from the last years of the British regime to the first years of Congress rule. For this sort of thing to be effective, there is need for economy in detail and phrasing, a careful fusion of the personal and historical perspectives, an avoidance of attitudes that might set up the Army as something wholly outside the mainstream of national life, and, above all, a controlling sense of form. Malgonkar is not an indigenous John Masters; nor is *Distant Drum* an Indo-Anglian variation of the Anglo-Indian *Bhowani Junction*. There is, on the contrary, an authentic quality about Malgonkar and his novel that can stand scrutiny without reference to the Masters recipe. *Distant Drum* is the story of a 'Satpura' officer, Kiran (Jacko) Garud, who thus becomes a near symbol of the Satpuras and a vague symbol of the Army itself and its code. Kiran's contacts with his brother officers — Hindu, Muslim, British — show how, although the code may be one, individual

officers make what they please of it. "Look upon *this* code", Malgonkar seems to say, "and *this* — the civilian code!" Kiran himself is by no means a paragon: his liaison during the war with a British officer's wife had led to the husband's suicide, and taking a leaf from that closed chapter, Kiran has decided that he would be wiser in his relations with women in the future. Falling now in love with Bina Sonal, he finds that her father, a senior civil servant high up in the New Delhi hierarchy, has other worldly-wise plans for her. Kiran feels peeved, and is bold enough to tell Mr. Sonal:

I see your point of view, of course, but not the sense. You want to find a rich husband for your daughter, possibly even against her own feelings in the matter. To ensure that, you are quite determined to go to any length; use all your influence, ruin half-a-dozen careers, if necessary...

The senior civil servant — that Napoleon of Red Tape, that Generalissimo of Files — *could* be an odious and contemptible figure, but one must still hope that men like Mr. Sonal are the exceptions and not the rule. In the end, love proves stronger than even Mr. Sonal, and Kiran and Bina are to be happily married, after all.

If, for Malgonkar, the army officer stands for certain positive qualities, the political boss typifies the opposite qualities. Malgonkar's portrait of Lala Vishnu Saran Dev the Congress boss is sheer caricature, but one knows also that there *are* such Lalas all over the country and they do hold fast to the faith: "Now the party and the government are the shame"! The civil servant in the seats of power at New Delhi, the party bosses pulling strings from far far away,—and, of course, *the party and the government are the shame!* Such is the implied indictment in the novel. Not that the Army hasn't its black sheep too — its 'bastards' and its boobies. But take it all in all, the Army is a cleaner thing than a mere political party. At least the Army has ever to be ready to undergo ordeal by fire; and the ballot-box is a much tamer affair compared to the modern battle-field.

While the army-civilian clash of codes provides the background, Kiran's love for Bina and his friendship with Abdul Jamal form the human foci that hold the action together. Abdul

and Kiran had been together at the military academy at Dehra Dun, they had seen service together in Burma during the war, and later still, they had faced the 1947 riots together at Delhi for three whole days:

No one had asked them to work, but once having plunged in, there was no getting out. You never left your tigers half-dead. Those three days were crammed with incidents such as other men do not see in a life-time. Time and again, the frenzied mobs had broken the curfew and had come rampaging out into the open, drunk with hatred and fear and madness...

But one thing stood out, although neither of them could have thought about it at the time. Neither he nor Abdul had been conscious of the fact that they belonged to the opposing factions in the riots...he and Abdul had been able to work together in the closest accord, their loyalties to each other absolutely unruptured by that incessant strain.

After the partition, they find themselves fighting on opposite sides in Kashmir, and they are left to square the circle of private friendship *versus* national loyalties. *Kismet* thus separates Kiran from Abdul, though it also united him with Bina. The partition came like an unexpectedly virulent storm, and individuals were like leaves blown away, now this side now that, and when the uneasy calm followed the storm, the prospect was changed out of recognition. Only memories, and regrets, remained—moving about like ghosts in the night.

Divided into three Parts, the story begins at the Raniwada Cantonment, and promises to end there as well. The rest of the story is narrated in spells of retrospective narration. For a first novel, *Distant Drum* has unusual distinction, for not only does Malgonkar make his characters and incidents stand out clearly, he has also a feeling for form and atmosphere.

Malgonkar's second novel, *Combat of Shadows* (1962), carries this epigraph from the *Gita*: "Desire and Aversion are opposite shadows" The scene, as in Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud*, is set in a tea estate in Assam, but the time is almost twenty years later, the years of transition from peace to war. Henry Winton who manages the Silent Hill tea estate gets an attractive Anglo-Indian girl, Ruby Miranda, as headmistress of the estate school, and they become lovers. But it is Eddie Trevor, the hockey player, who is really in love with

Ruby. Going 'home' on leave, Winton marries Jean Walters whom he had met earlier in India, and on his return tries unsuccessfully to snap his ties with Ruby. It turns out that Jean had met Eddie on the boat, and they now become lovers. It is a tangle of relationships reminiscent of a typical Hardy novel. At first Winton has the best of both Ruby and Jean; and, presently, both Ruby and Jean turn to Eddie. The novel really moves round the foci of Winton and Eddie, who are a perfect study in contrast: the former so self-centred and calculating because of an in-built fear of failure, the latter so open-hearted and free and fearless being the perfect sport. But this story of love and lust, of desire and aversion, is deftly intertwined with the story of the hunting of the one-tusked rogue elephant. Winton is asked to take the job on, but at the crucial moment something goes wrong with the cartridges, Winton's nerve fails him, and it is Kistulal the shikari who is trampled to death by the elephant while Winton manages to make good his escape. A story is cooked up to save Winton's (and the white man's) prestige, yet there are rumours, and Kistulal's son, Pasupati, although now employed by Winton, nurses secret resentment against him. After successfully dealing with a strike by the workers, Winton goes on leave to England. Sometime after his return, being confronted with irrefutable proof of his wife's infidelity with Eddie, Winton arranges with diabolical cunning that Eddie should be killed by the rogue elephant. Now Eddie is the illegitimate son of Sudden Dart, the Resident Director of the tea estates, and he takes double revenge: he shoots the elephant himself, and with Ruby's and Pasupati's help lays a trap for Winton, who walks unsuspectingly into it and is burnt in the game cottage.

Besides these two intertwining themes—sexual passion and hunting big game — there is also the Gauri-Jugal Kishore complication. Jugal is an employee of the tea estate but becomes labour leader, then M.L.A., and finally Minister under provincial autonomy; and Gauri his 'niece' develops a love-hate relationship to Winton. She is a competitor with Ruby for the school-mistress' job (with all its implications), she leads the strikers against Winton, she reveals to him the place of Jean's tryst with Eddie, and when Winton sustains a sprain she almost carries him to his house. Unpleasant and unscrupulous but not entirely

without qualities of his own, Winton is betrayed as much by chance and circumstance as by his own defects of character. The end, of course, is melodramatic, an ingenious exercise in 'poetic justice'; and Winton dies in the knowledge that Ruby, Pasupati and Sudden have together brought that terrible punishment to him.

Combat of Shadows is a well-constructed novel. The two Parts — 'Prelude to Home Leave' and 'Return from Leave' — give the novel the neat symmetry of the hour-glass. Tea and pythons, love and passion, sportsmanship and vendetta are the conflicting forces in the shadow play. Like the cry of the peacocks in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, the eerie cry of the python in Malgonkar's novel means a call to mating and also a call to rain. The pythons, Winton explains to his wife, go into coils and squeeze whatever they have caught. The entire action of the novel has this python-movement, for Winton is caught at the very beginning although he doesn't realize it; he wriggles, he strikes out, but the coils only get smaller and smaller, and there is really no hope for him. If there is this 'combat of shadows' in the jungle of the larger action, there is a close-up struggle in the gun-room of Winton's bungalow: "It was made for security; it was also made for privacy". This is the room where Winton and Ruby make love, and later, Jean and Eddie. It is here that Ruby breaks the bottle that Winton gives her, and the room is flooded with its perfume, and "the scent soaked quickly into the heavy pile of the carpet". It is the clinging of this scent to Jean's cardigan that proves to Winton that Eddie and his wife had been making love on the gun-room carpet. The secret of the good and the 'nogood' cartridges is also a sort of shadow-boxing in the gun-room.

A second focus of the inner action is the game cottage, and what begins in the gun-room is concluded in the game cottage. With its false moon, the game cottage is meant to lure wild animals at night for a kill, the gun-room providing the required ammunition. Like the beasts of the jungle, the human beings are trapped too — Kistulal, Eddie, and finally Winton himself. There is implied a causal chain of commission and nemesis, but none of the characters is self-poised enough to be able to beyond the combat of the shadows of desire and aversion and "rise to a

knowledge of reality". Passions rage, attitudes clash, and we are made aware of the divers backgrounds—the tea estate and the jungle, the racial antagonisms, the global holocaust of the war. There are also various sidelights on business ethics and on the ethics of gamesmanship — able-bodied managers avoiding the war on the plea that "tea's a very important weapon of war", Sudden Dart bribing Jugal Kishore for being on the side of the planters, Winton neglecting his obligations as a hunter — that add a certain piquancy to the narrative. Altogether Malgonkar has fused the several elements in the story to convincing effect, and the novel succeeds as much by the careful plotting and the interior stitching as by the power of the writing to evoke situation and atmosphere alike.

In his next novel, *The Princes* (1963), Malgonkar tries to tell the story of an Indian prince — a prince who is an interesting individual as well as a plausible representative of a class. In all his novels Malgonkar is fascinated by the impact of Hitler's war on men and institutions and attitudes. Moving from peace to war in 1939, and again from war to peace in 1945, things have been subjected to a double shift of change and transformation. Abhay-raj is the Yuvarajah of Begwad (a North Indian 'native' State), his father the Maharajah being one of the six hundred who ruled 'Indian India' of pre-independence days. At the end of the war, independence came doubled with the partition of the country; and in India, Sardar Patel partly cajoled and partly bullied the Rulers into giving up their sovereign rights and signing the instrument of merger with the Indian Union. The change for the Rulers was not more revolutionary than the change for the peoples of their States. The place of the Maharajahs was, as a general rule, taken by upstart demagogues and careerist politicians, and it is not surprising that the people began casting their eyes nostalgically back to the days that are no more:

. . . most of them would gladly give up their right to vote for a return to the severities of the old order . . . the rough and ready justice, on the spot and promptly delivered, the large number of holidays, the pomp and pageantry, the frequent ceremonials, freedom to drink and dance and not have to pay any income tax. They cannot divorce the creeping joylessness of life, the crippling rise in the cost of living, the infliction of prohibition, from the change in the administration. . . . In

a sense, it is the tragedy of the people who are ruled by instinct more than reason, sentiment more than logic.

The narrator in *The Princes* is Abhay, who proves to be the last of the Rulers of Begwad, and Malgonkar presents him as being broadly typical of the tribe, neither worse nor better than the average. It is through Abhay's eyes that we see the Bedars of Begwad, his parents the Maharajah and the Maharani, his people, — and himself. While still young and very ill, Abhay has a traumatic experience: he sees his adored mother in the lustful embrace of Abdulla Jan, the Palace Officer. Although he dismisses it at first as mere hallucination, the shock periodically returns and the time comes when he cannot deceive himself any longer. Nursing implacable resentment against her husband for his callous neglect of her almost since their marriage, she has rebelled at last, and taken Abdulla as her lover; presently she leaves Begwad, then India, to join and marry Abdulla in Pakistan, the culminating shock to Abhay being her willing conversion to Islam. This is one strand in the story that doesn't cohere with the total fabric. One can of course imagine how the sequence of events must have affected Abhay's sensibility and inner poise. With this family background, it is not very surprising that Abhay's own life should run a wayward course. Although he makes a far more satisfactory marriage than his father, and in his own way is devoted to Kamala his wife, this doesn't prevent his continuing, off and on, a dubious relationship with Minnie the Anglo-Indian girl, and later with Zarina his father's concubine's niece. And Abhay is even quite complacent, if not self-righteous, about it :

No shadow of sin hung over us, nor a sense of guilt. It was as though whatever we were doing was merely a compliment to our respective married lives. It was, above all, an experience which wore away the barbs of intolerance that lay like thorns buried deep within me for all these years.

Again (this about Zarina):

I seemed to grow into the new pattern of my life, with its separate compartments for sex and family life, each lived with a new richness and fullness.

At the political level, the issue is polarized between Abhay and his ex-schoolmate, Kanakchand, who becomes in due course the local Praja Mandal chief and (after integration) Education Minister, — a repetition, with some difference, of the progress of Jugal Kishore in *Combat of Shadows*. The momentous constitutional changes notwithstanding, the primitive Bhils are fantastically loyal to the Begwad rulers, and not least to the last of them, Abhay-raj. In the dust-storm of prejudice raised by the demagogues, it becomes easy to damn Abhay and the Bhils at once, and after the climactic scene in which Kanakchand and Abhay both have the satisfaction of having fulfilled their vows — Kanakchand of seeing the end of Bedar rule, Abhay of publicly flogging Kanakchand — Abhay renounces even the privileges of an ex-Ruling Prince and abdicates his title as well.

Although Abhay tries to be objective in presenting the issue between the old Princes and the new demagogues, the old personal administration and the new brown bureaucracy, although he sets forth impartially the old backwardness, superstition and exploitation as also the new progress, the schools and dams, and the democratic institutions, still it is difficult to resist the impression that the novel is somewhat of a special pleading for the old order that has now vanished for ever. This would be even clearer if *The Princes* were read after Mulk Raj Anand's *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, published ten years earlier. And indeed Abhay frankly admits that he feels himself "a spokesman for whatever the princely order once stood for". Of his own father he writes: "He always felt much more at home with the past than with the present". Abhay, on the other hand, is by temperament more attuned to the present and is interested in the future, but he too cannot help casting a last lingering look at the past.

The Princes, with its larger canvas and its more varied characters, lacks the tightness of structure that is so noticeable in *Combat of Shadows*. Palace life, school life, army life, primitive life, domestic life, sport, hunting, intrigue, demagoguery, sensuality, all are thrown together, and now and then one wonders whether the novel has not been put together, shaped and coloured so as to meet the predictable expectations of Western readers. While the Begwad and Patalpat scenes give the narrative a touch of the strange and the antique, the New Delhi scenes redress the

balance and emphasise the brightly trivial and the unutterably inane. "I was certainly learning to handle conversation", Abhay says after two years in New Delhi; "meaningless, insincere, but light. You had to keep it frothy, that was all that mattered". Here and there, one cannot resist the feeling that words or situations are just planted with an eye to the audience, but in its totality the picture of Begwad — and Begwad as the prototype of the vanished princely order — seems to stand the test enunciated by Abhay himself: "To me it was something of a sacrilege to falsify the past; to whitewash it was to render it sterile". It may be said of the Begwad of *The Princes* that it strikes us as being neither false nor sterile.

Once again, in Malgonkar's fourth novel, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964),¹ the role of the second world war in effecting radical changes in the affairs of men and nations is heavily underlined. The war certainly gave a sort of shock treatment to men, nations, continents, and when the war ended, the old order was no more. In *The Princes*, we start with half-inaccessible Begwad, but the larger Indian background is seldom lost in sight. The issue is between Red and Yellow in the old maps of India, and we end with the complete obliteration of the difference. In *A Bend in the Ganges*, on the other hand, the issue is first between Indian nationalism and British colonialism, but soon the issue between Hindu and Muslim throws into the shade the more fundamental fight for freedom from British rule. The ultimate outcome of the double conflict is both freedom and the division of the country, but before this result could emerge and take root, an intestine struggle takes place. Hell is let loose in whole provinces, cities, villages, streets. As the Author's Note states succinctly:

What was achieved through non-violence, brought with it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history: twelve million people had to flee, leaving their homes; nearly half a million were killed; over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted, raped and mutilated.

The shame and the agony of the partition, the glory and the defeat of the hour of freedom: the "tryst with destiny" that was

¹ The title, significantly enough, comes from the *Ramayana*: "At a bend in the Ganges, they paused to take a look at the land they were leaving."

also the death-trap fashioned by the malignant Time Spirit: the horror and the humiliation, the terror and the pity of it all are the theme of Malgonkar's novel.

The opening chapter, 'A Ceremony of Purification', describes the ceremonial burning of foreign cloth. Gandhiji himself, the apostle of Truth and Non-violence, appears on the platform, though he doesn't speak, it being his day of silence. The cries *Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai! Bharat-Mata-ki-jai!* rend the air. In the last chapters of the novel, there is more burning but now it is Indian cities that are on fire; it is the Hindus and Muslims who are killing one another in tens of thousands. Is this "a ceremony of purification" too? In a moment of divination, Gandhiji had himself once posed the question (given as an epigraph to the novel):

It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosoms the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can true, voluntary non-violence come out of this seeming forced non-violence of the weak? Is it not a futile experiment I am conducting? What if, when the fury bursts, not a man, woman, or child is safe and every man's hand is raised against his neighbour?

And that is exactly how it turned out. *A Bend in the Ganges* is an attempt to unfold this national tragedy, though very largely under the guise of fiction.

No doubt it needs a Tolstoy, if not indeed a Vyasa, to tell the whole unvarnished story of united India breaking up into two, experiencing the terrific convulsions of unimaginable fratricidal strife. Malgonkar's model, however, is neither the *Mahabharata* nor *War and Peace*. He aims, not at exhausting the subject with an overwhelming mass of detail, but at the random sampling of something of the horror of the event — the horror, the pity and the futility. In the early chapters, we follow the fortunes of two closely related families, those of the Big House and those of the Little House (they might be the Kauravas and the Pandavas of the obscure village, Konshet); Vishnu-dutt of the Big House kills Hari of the Little House, and Hari's brother, Gian, kills Vishnu-dutt using the same axe. Gian is duly sentenced to transportation for life, and sent to the Andamans. And it is this same Gian who, in the first chapter, had cheered Gandhiji and sworn

by non-violence. Like a prologue to the main act, this story of family feud — suspicion, rivalry, hatred, vindictiveness, murder — is to be viewed as the advance micro-tragedy foreshadowing the macro-tragedy on a national scale in the year of the partition.

In other early chapters, we are introduced to Shafi Usman alias Singh, with his battle-cry "A million shall die — a million", and Debi-Dayal, Gian's college-mate and the only son of the rich Tekchand. Shafi and Debi are nationalists and fellow-terrorists, but soon Shafi is won over to Muslim nationalism, Debi is betrayed, and after arrest and trial sent to the Andamans. Debi's sister, Sundari, makes an unhappy marriage, and shifts to Bombay. The Japanese occupation of the Andamans during the war enables Gian and Debi — in different ways — to return to India. Gian wins Sundari's affections under false pretences, but is found out and rejected. Debi, in an attempt to punish his betrayer, Shafi, takes away his mistress, Mumtaz. On the eve of independence and partition, murderous frenzy possesses millions of Hindus and Muslims, and Debi is in a mood of introspection:

'A million shall die!' Debi kept remembering. That was what Shafi had predicted . . . perish as a result of the violence hidden in the mist of non-violence. . . . Yet, what was the alternative? Would terrorism have won freedom at a cheaper price and somehow still kept the Hindus and Muslims together? Perhaps not. But at least it would have been an honest sacrifice, honest and manly—not something that had sneaked upon them in the garb of non-violence.

How had they come to this? After living as brothers over so many generations, how had they suddenly been infected by such virulent hatred for each other? Who had won, Gandhi or the British. . . .

Debi tries to cross over to Lahore to help his parents, but Mumtaz insists upon going with him; and both fall victims to Muslim mob fury. At Lahore, Shafi and his friends break into Tekchand's house. Although unwanted, Gian is with the family, to be of help to them. In the violent struggle that follows, Sundari's mother is killed, and Gian and Sundari manage to kill Shafi with the image of Shiva, once worshipped in the Little House at Konshet and later sold by Gian to Tekchand. Sundari, Gian and Tekchand join the caravan to India, but on the way Tekchand too is lost; only Gian and Sundari return to India. This is how "the sunrise of our freedom" found millions done to

death, mutilated or shamed, and tens of millions dispossessed of all that they had owned and cherished, and brutally tossed on the other side of the new artificial border between India and Pakistan.

In all his four novels, Malgonkar reveals a sound historical sense. His studies of the Mahratta naval chieftain, Kanhoji Angrey, and the Puars of Dewas Senior give abundant evidence of his flair for historical biography, and works like *The Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges* are but bolder experiments in artistically fusing the personal and historical perspectives in fictional terms. His latest novel, *Spy in Amber* (1971), is based on his screenplay for a Hindi producer, and we owe the novelized version to his daughter Suniti Malgonkar's initiative and talent. *Spy in Amber* is a thriller after the manner of Ian Fleming. A Tibetan monastery, and China's designs on its treasure: frantic attempts to send it away to a place of safety in India, and ruthless counter-measures by the Chinese: a mixture of intrigue, suspense and sex—and a thrilling conclusion. It is doubtless a tribute to Malgonkar's virtuosity, but it is doubtful if it will specially enhance his reputation as a novelist.

The Women Novelists

In 1951, a Professor of English in one of the Scottish universities told me, half in earnest, that there were five or six women writers who usually made, year after year, some of the most significant contributions to the English novel. It was almost a case of more women than men, qualitatively as well as numerically! Jane Austen and George Eliot, the Brontes and Mrs. Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf had established their own 'great tradition', and today a woman novelist in England, lacking neither a room of her own nor financial independence, can ordinarily hold her own with the male of the species. Women are natural story-tellers even when they don't write or publish. And in India we have seen how the marvellous Torulata ('Toru Dutt') wrote both a French and an English novel before she died at the age of 21 in 1877. Other women writers too have since made their mark in Indian fiction in English.

Precocious as Toru was, she had also her limitations. She lived a life insulated from the currents of the seething world outside. The memory of the death of her brother, and more especially of the death of her elder sister Aru, seeped into her sensibility. Her understanding of romantic love was largely drawn from literature, while death was something she had seen. When she turned to the writing of fiction, it was natural she should draw upon the limited fund of her own experience. In the result, both her novels — *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* — became inevitably, at whatever remove, autobiographical projections. The unfinished *Bianca* appeared posthumously in the *Bengal Magazine*, in 1878; *Le Journal* was published, also posthumously, in France, and recently (1963) an English translation by Prithwindra Mukherjee came out serially in the *Illustrated Weekly*. The story of Bianca and her sister Inez and the story of Marguerite and Sister Vero-

nique are two separate attempts to tell the same inner tragedy of sisterly love and bereavement. But superimposed on this theme, there is in both novels the romantic love motif also. But what is this strange and fascinating and terrible agony (or ecstasy) that the poets called 'love'? When Bianca is kissed for the first time by Lord Moore, she feels "as if she had drunk of the heavenly hydromel of the poets, she wanted to take a deeper draught of the drink of the gods". She is intoxicated, she is deeply disturbed; she must tell her father about it! His anger on being told frightens her, and she starts sobbing. The passage from innocence to experience is far from smooth. Naïve she may be — certainly, Toru was no Françoise Sagan — but her integrity is beyond question. Marguerite in the French novel is Bianca a little grown up, a little less naïve, but no less resigned to her fate. She loves Dunois who is unworthy of her, and makes a mess of his life by killing his brother for the love of a parlour-maid. After this disaster, Marguerite is resigned enough to come to terms with reality; she agrees to marry the patient Louis, and she does achieve growth in understanding and love in her married life; and she is content to die after bearing his child. Although Bianca is supposedly a Spanish maiden and Marguerite a French girl, they are both in Toru's delineation essentially Indian, ardent, sincere, and capable of love and equally capable of resignation.

Among other early novels by women writers may be mentioned Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife*, or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876) and Mrs. Krupabai Sathianadhan's *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895). Mrs. Ghoshal (Swarnakumari Debi) was probably the first woman novelist in Bengali, and two of her novels were translated into English as *An Unfinished Song* (1913) and *The Fatal Garland* (1915), a historical novel. As in Toru's Marguerite story, in *An Unfinished Song* also the heroine, Moni, changes from Romanath the sophisticated but flawed barrister to Doctor Chotu whom she marries happily in the end. In *The Fatal Garland*, Ganesh Dev is torn between Shakti whom he loves and Nirupama whom he marries under the misapprehension (induced by his mother) that Shakti is married already. Santa and Sita Chatterjee (daughters of Ramananda Chatterjee, editor of the *Modern Review*) had a Brahmo background, and wrote

novels and short stories in Bengali and had them translated into English afterwards: *Tales of Bengal* (1922), *The Cage of Gold* (1923) and *The Garden Creeper* (1931). Already there is a hint of the new realism breaking into the mould of traditional romance. Anindita of Sita Chatterjee's *The Knight Errant* has vague affiliations with Tagore's Binodini, but lacks the latter's psychological subtlety. The yarns are interesting enough, but they are not distinguished either by their tightness of texture or characterisation in depth.

Cornelia Sorabji was the author of a number of stories, some of which appeared in the *Macmillan's Magazine* and the *Nineteenth Century and After*. Her best work was collected in *Love and Life behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sun-Babies: Studies in the Child-Life of India* (1904) and *Between the Twilights* (1908). Coming from a Parsi-Christian background, in her most successful work Miss Sorabji tried to penetrate the silken curtain of the 'purdah' and reveal the nuances of femineity. Are love and exciting life possible behind the purdah? Indeed, yes; with just a shade of difference, may be, yet love and life all the same. Still waters could run deep. Ecstasy, tragedy, tragi-comedy, comedy are all possible behind the purdah. The situations are often touched with sadness, melancholy, sometimes even despair; and early widowhood (if not *sati* or self-immolation) made woman's life a precarious affair. Woman was easily caught in the meshes of intrigue, and social taboos of all kinds and her subservience to man gave her very little freedom of action. Yet she managed to endure somehow, by sheer power of her womanliness — her gifts of beauty, love, patience, compassion and goodness. Miss Sorabji's disapproval of the evil customs doesn't affect the humanity of her portraits of the victims of those customs. "The pity of it — O the pity of it", Miss Sorabji seems to murmur: that one should ascend the funeral pyre to save one's sister from that fate or that a barren wife should feel called upon to remove herself from the scene so that her husband may marry again! Much of the drama behind the purdah is "static", in the sense *The Book of Job* presents "static tragedy". The silent suffering, however, is often more eloquent than violent action or speech that tears passion to tatters. A later writer, Iqbalunnisa Hussain, in her *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim House-*

hold (1944), has also tried with commendable success to present the currents and cross-currents in a typical Muslim family.

It is, however, only after the second world war that women novelists of quality have begun enriching Indian fiction in English. Of these writers, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Nabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding. Kamala Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), has been compared with Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, though a nearer and apter analogy would be K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller*. Markandaya takes us to the heart of a South Indian—or Tamil Nad — village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years. Now industry and modern technology invade the village in the shape of a tannery, and from this impact sinister consequences issue. Markandaya writes that fear, hunger and despair are the constant companions of the peasant — “fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death”. What ‘nectar’ was to be churned out of the muddled ocean of poverty and misery? Where was the cure for the advancing disease of overpopulation or the hopeless wailing of the helpless?

Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object cannot live.

But the heart that is tempered in the flames of love and faith, of suffering and sacrifice, will not easily accept defeat. Rukmani the narrator-heroine is also a Mother of Sorrows. She receives shock after shock: for example, her husband Nathan's infidelity, her daughter's sacrificial going on the streets to save the family from starvation, the death of the child Kuti, the ejection from the house. This last is very hard to bear for villagers with their ineradicable adhesion to property:

This home my husband had built for me with his own hands. . . . In it we had lain together, and our children had been born. This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought. They do not know what they do to us.

Nathan and Rukmini leave the village to join their son, only to

find that he has disappeared, abandoning his own wife and children. Other trials are in store for them, they become stone-breakers, they even save a little money, but before they can return to their village, Nathan dies leaving Rukmini forlorn. She is presently back in her village, and her journeyings over, she finds peace at last. She has lost her dear and errant husband no doubt, but she has brought Puli with her, their adopted son. They and the other children, Selvam and Ira, start to rebuild their fortunes on the ruins of the old. Calm after storm, spring after winter — such is the unending cycle. One must hope, and one must persevere even if one is engaged only in trying to discover “nectar in a sieve”!

If *Nectar in a Sieve* recalls Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller*, Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* (1957) recalls his *Kandan the Patriot*. Where Venkataramani is poetical and masculine, Markandaya is suggestive and feminine. If her writing is less rich in imagery, it has more ease and partakes more of life's fitful fever. Like her earlier novel, this too is cast in the autobiographical form and exploits the freedom of reverie. But, of course, there is a world of difference between Rukmini and Mira, the heroine of *Some Inner Fury*. Mira is a creature of imagination and memory, and in her, naturalness and sophistication are in uneasy partnership. The story begins with the return of her brother Kit with his Oxford friend Richard. Govind her adopted brother, Premala who marries Kit, and Roshan the rich lady who angles in the troubled waters of emancipation and revolutionary politics comprise the principal *Dramatis personae*. There is, besides, Hickey the missionary, a variation of Kenny of *Nectar in a Sieve*. Almost as in a typical Hardy novel, intensities clash and malignant forces are let loose. Govind, wishing to escape from his hopeless love for Premala, becomes a revolutionary; Premala, escaping from the stifling atmosphere of her husband's home as often as she can, helps Hickey in his humanitarian work; and Mira and Richard seek happiness in each other's arms. But the 'Quit India' movement overtakes and carries them along and finally engulfs them. It is a ghastly mistake certainly, but revolutions breed such mistakes: Premala is suffocated and dies. Kit dies of a knife-wound, and Richard falls a victim to mob fury. Mira returns to her home, to be shut up with the ghosts of her memo-

ries; and from time to time the slow pain comes "seeping up, filling up my throat with grief, flowing from throat to temple".

Some Inner Fury is a tragedy engineered by politics, even as *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy engineered by economics; and in both novels the chief characters transcend the bludgeonings of economic or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity. Of all the characters in *Some Inner Fury*, Premala is the sweetest, even the most heroic, whose mother sadness is as potent as her mother love or mother might, whose silence is stronger than all rhetoric, and whose seeming capacity for resignation is the true measure of her measureless strength. She more than the sophisticated Kit and Mira, more than the rebel Govind and the reckless Roshan, is symbolic of the Mother — Mother India who is compassion and sufferance, who must indeed suffer all hurts and survive all disasters. Shortly before her tragic death, she looks transfigured through suffering and the new love that has seized and given new life to her:

Excitement had sent the colour to her cheeks; and there was something else, less evanescent, about her too—a glow, a serenity, which had not been there since she came to live in this city. Yet it was a serenity of a different order—finer, more tempered, as if the dross had been taken from its virgin gold in some unknown fiery crucible—a serenity that does not come, save on the far side of suffering.

And after she is dead, having apparently fought hard for her breath, for life, her face is as serene as ever, with no trace at all of the struggle or the pain.

"A whole war lies between us", writes Mira remembering the lost Richard; the war and the national struggle had used them, as they had used others, and wrenched them for ever apart. "But what matter to the universe", she tells herself, "if now and then a world is born or a star should die; or what matter to the world, if here and there a man should fall, or a head or a heart should break". The novel is really Mira's extended recollection of the recent past: the emotions and passions and stolen ecstasies and thwarted purposings recollected in a mood of comparative tranquillity. As one closes the book, one is exhausted somewhat, but not too exhausted to ask the question: What did happen exactly? Was it Govind who threw the knife and killed Kit? Did Hickey

lie when he swore that he saw Govind do the deed, or did Mira lie when she swore that she had held Govind's hands firmly, and hence he simply couldn't have done it? In Forster's *A Passage to India* too, the truth of what actually happened to Miss Quested in the Marabar Caves is merely left to be guessed. Kamala Markandaya has presented two half-truths, two fragments of the truth, but how shall we piece them together? We rack our brains in vain, and the mystery remains.

Kamala Markandaya's third novel, *A Silence of Desire* (1961), leaves economics and politics behind and invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities. 'Quit India' has been followed by partition and independence, and ten years have elapsed since then. The scene is an obscure town, a white-washed house in the suburbs, and a village beyond the river reached by a ferry. Dandekar, a government servant, tortures himself and nearly goes to pieces because his wife, Sarojini, ailing from a tumour, seeks faith-cure from the 'Swamy', sometimes at the white-washed house and sometimes in his village retreat. What sort of man is he, the Swamy? — a saint or merely a charlatan? Is faith-healing possible? Sarojini tells her husband:

Yes. You can call it healing by faith, or healing by the grace of God, if you understand what that means. But I do not expect you to understand—you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition, when all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out. . . .

Visits to the Swamy's place leave Dandekar more confused than ever. When he is with the Swamy, Dandekar sees things differently from when he is by himself or with his friends or his boss, Chari. The pug-faced Dwarf at the Swamy's place is the sharp means of helping Dandekar to one or two insights; Sarojini and Dandekar's cousin, Rajam, also try to make him see; and Dandekar himself comes very nearly to the point of belief but soon falls back:

Dandekar knew, now, what Sarojini had believed. When you were with the Swamy, actually there, nothing material, or physical, mattered. You saw things for the worthless trumperies that they were, rose above your body, knew for a while the meaning of peace. Then you came away and the pains crept back, the worry, the misery, the lust for gold chains and silver cups.

Essentially of the earth (and, partly, even of the gutter), Dandekar begs Chari to 'shift' Swamy from the place so that Sarojini may be fully reclaimed. Chari and his assistant, Ghose, start inquiries, and these seem to have no end, and lead to no firm conclusion. Chari's finding is that the simple villagers are satisfied with the Swamy and take him for a saint and a saviour, while the sophisticated urbanites are disturbed and confused; and Chari "wondered bleakly which was the truer sophistication". After all, the Swamy sustains with faith and hope some few scores or hundreds of men and women — the crippled, the derelict, the maimed in body and soul. In the end, the Swamy goes away of his own accord, and Sarojini (already armed with the strength of faith) undergoes a successful operation and accepts resignedly her separation from the Swamy. But Dandekar is left with a corroding sense of guilt. He has a final encounter with the Dwarf, and their pointed exchanges are significant. The Dwarf charges Dandekar with having been the cause of the Swamy's departure and the consequent misery of the derelict now left disconsolate behind; and Dandekar had done it all just for the sake of a handful of silver and gold! But Dandekar, although shaken, has self-possession enough to answer:

* I wanted these things (i.e. the silver and gold) and I fought for them because they meant a great deal to me. That is a fragment of the truth. But I fought also for other things—my wife, myself, my children, and these are the other fragments, of which even you must be aware. You told me, once, why you came here: that your mind might not grow as warped as your body. Remember that, as I shall remember all my life those who are here, the derelict.

Again we clutch at fragments of the truth only, and even as we try to shake them together to make them fuse into a compound, the retort bursts and there is nothing to hold on to. Is the Swamy a saint or a charlatan? Is the Dwarf a compassionate *sadhak* or a monster with a mind as twisted as his body? Is Dandekar ruled by love and humanity or only by greed and lust? These are but fragments of disparate truth, and the 'whole' but teasingly eludes our grasp. Perhaps her most ambitious novel, *A Silence of Desire* dares the invisible and the writing is competent enough to forge here and there coils of intricate suggestion that almost

seem to bridge the chasm between matter and spirit, doubt and faith.

Possession (1963), Kamala Markandaya's fourth novel, is in a sense, a continuation of *A Silence of Desire*. The Swamy figures again, but he seems to have grown in the meantime; he is a 'modern' Swamy, he flies to London, he is as much at home in Society as among the silences, and he has admirers (if not disciples) in the most sophisticated circles. In *A Silence*, his antagonist is the pitiable Dandekar who is afraid he is losing — or might lose — his wife, and his silver and gold. In *Possession*, Swamy's antagonist is the formidable Caroline Bell—"rich, divorced, well-born"—who has spirited away the Tamil rustic boy Valmiki and made a painter and paramour of him. She would possess him, if she could. But she has to reckon with her rivals: Ellie with her nightmarish memories of a Nazi concentration camp, the girl Annabel, the pet monkey Minou that Val is so fond of, and above all the Swamy himself under whose protection Val had been before Caroline swooped upon him and took him away to London. Ultimately the Swamy wins, and Caroline suffers discomfiture. Even in *A Silence*, although Dandekar apparently wins, for after all Surojini returns to him and the Swamy practically disappears, the real victory is with the Swamy. When the issue is joined, the sovereignty of the spirit must score over the ego's armoured regiments. All 'possession' is slavery, or a perilous precariousness. What we try to possess is taken away, sooner or later: Val loses Ellie, Annabel, and even Minou the monkey; and Caroline loses Val. It is giving, not taking, it is losing — not possessing — that paves the way to fulfilment.

In *Possession*, the scene shifts from India to England and America, and again back to India; and the clash of wills, the contrasts in scene and situation, the unleashing of passions, the confusion of cross-purposes, all contribute to the exoticism of the drama unfolded here: Caroline, so purblindly ruthless and demanding, and the Swamy so full of serene self-assurance, fighting an unequal battle with Val for prize! Yet the real theme of the novel is not economics, politics or even spirituality, but Art — what is the 'soul' of Art, what is the 'elan' that makes Art possible? Technique has its uses, but the essence of Art is not a

matter of technique. Val's work makes an American critic say: "This young painter paints as if unknown to himself he had glimpsed, beyond the horizon, the transcendent powers of the Universe, and the refracted light brings a hint of the power and the menace into his own painting". Anasuya (who is supposed to tell the story) finds these words "disturbing in their insight and impact", but after seeing his still maturer work in the cave on his return to India, she comments:

There was, too, a change in his work, so subtle it might easily have been a flight of fancy: but to me there seemed to be a moving, extraordinary yearning in the human countenances he had depicted, upturned, groping towards the light, a quality of compassion and profundity in his divine images, that had never been apparent before.

After the fever of his sensual escapade to Civilisation, Val is now able to offer his all — make his *atmasamarpana* — to the Supreme. It is said of true devotional music that, although human ears may enjoy it, the music is addressed really to Him. What if Val's pictures are half-buried in an inaccessible cave in an out-of-the-way place in South India? The subject and the audience alike is the divine spirit; Val "works for that, and therein is the glory", says the Swamy, and gently adds: "it gives men a satisfaction so rich they cannot explain it, and mostly they do not even wish to".

While the deeper insights in the novel are about the secret informing and sustaining power of Art, the folly and futility of the average human desire for "possession" is overtly underlined again and again. Caroline takes possession of Val, dresses him up in the habiliments of civilization, and has him in tow, even as Val himself buys the tiny monkey, puts a scarlet hip-jacket upon him, and leads him by a gilt leather collar. The desire to possess, the perilous act of possession (for the possessor is himself possessed as well), the constant fear of losing — what is all this except "a grey and ugly trail of human misery, such as, horribly swollen but not unrecognizable, one saw stumbling in the wake of power-societies and empires"! The violence of the language here makes one almost suspect that, perhaps, Anasuya (or Kamala Markandaya) is trying to make the story of Caroline and Valmiki something of a parable of colonialism,

the passing of an empire, and the current insidious movement of 'neo-colonialism'. A novel built round a spiritual truth, *Possession* is rather less satisfying as a human story than its predecessors. There is no lack of incident, no dearth of characters. But although the interest doesn't flag, the situations and the principal characters do not quite carry conviction. The contrasts are too striking, the demonstration of the Swamy's victory over Caroline is too overwhelming. But for what it may be worth, Caroline has the last word in the novel.

In her fifth novel, *A Handful of Rice* (1966), Kamala Markandaya avoids the disturbing extravagance of *Possession* — extravagance in scene and situation. If the outer theme of *Nectar in a Sieve* was rural economics, the theme of *A Handful of Rice* is urban economics. Writing of this novel in *Indian Literature*, Prema Nandakumar compares it with Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*:

In Malamud's novel, a stray Christian waif, who comes to steal from a Jewish shop, stays on to help the shop-owner and win the love of the daughter. He is nagged by his mother-in-law and tortured by poverty. But the shop-owner's sudden breakdown makes him indispensable in the house and the shop. An identical situation is contrived in Kamala Markandaya's novel when Ravi breaks into Apu's household. He stays on to become an assistant to the tailor Apu and marries Apu's daughter, Nalini. Apu falls ill and Ravi takes charge of the house and the business. After Apu's death, he takes up Apu's daily struggle to keep his home and hearth alive. But though the story harks back to Malamud, it must be said in fairness to Kamala Markandaya that she completely transforms the atmosphere. It is a purely Indian tale, realistically linked to the present Indian economic situation...

Ravi has come from the village — his father is still there — and during his brief sojourn in the city of Madras he has learnt a thing or two from Damodar. Not only Ravi's father with his village training, even Ravi's father-in-law, Apu the tailor, are men of tradition, accepting their lot in life, not questioning, not rebelling. But by and by Ravi is exposed to the evil that rages in its many forms in the city. The insensitivity of the affluent, their mania for conspicuous consumption, their hardness of heart: the exploitation of small fish by the

big, the worker by the capitalist, the Apus of the world by the Big Shops in Mount Road: and the infernal success of the bootlegger, the blackmarketeer, the drug-peddler at the cost of the poor, the down and out, the desperate—these are the images of the modern city. Caught between the pull of the old tradition that all but strangles him and the pull of the new immorality that attracts as well as frightens him, Ravi lurches now this side now the other side, and has the worst of both. Even between husband and wife there is a gulf, as Ravi realises:

'You've been corrupted', she said. 'You go into all these big houses, see all these things, it gives you impossible ideas'.

'They're not impossible ideas'.

'They are. How can people like us ever be like them?'

'They're not made of different clay are they? There's nothing lays down *they* should always have the best and trample over us and do us down, and we should always come off worst?'

'They're a different class, that's all', she said with a catch in her voice...

The significance of the title of the novel can be grasped only by people who have witnessed the spiralling of grain prices in India. Bad monsoons have caused havoc in the lives of millions, and governments have proved incapable of effectively "holding the price line". The DMK Party was swept to power in Madras in 1967 with their pledge to provide rice for the poor at "a measure for a rupee". For some years now, all domestic budgeting in lower middle class and working class homes has proved a cruel mockery in the face of the steadily rising prices. Towards the end of the novel we read: "Insidiously, week by week, the price crept up. Then one month it shot skyward". Well, in such a situation, 'a handful of rice' could make all the difference between life and death. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the Ravi-Nalini romance doesn't run smoothly. In this urban atmosphere polluted by the poisonous fumes of exploitation in its myriad forms, the best run the risk of being corrupted; and the sanest could feel maddened to act wildly. What is, however, astonishing is the woman's power of patient endurance, her inexhaustible capacity for love, her simple tenderness. The sisters, Nalini and Thankam, are the salt of the earth. And the character of Nalini is exquisitely drawn. She is the sort that

can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. Fallible he may be, but he doesn't cease to be a credible human being, always more sinned against than sinning. Ravi is "not so very unlike us", says Professor T. A. Dunn; "His problems, his family, his thoughts and hopes are not very different from ours". It is the measure of Kamala Markandaya's success that she has given her novel this touch of universality.

In her latest novel, *The Coffey Dams* (1969), Kamala Markandaya returns, in a sense, to the theme of her first effort at fiction, *Nectar in a Sieve*, but of course her art, in the intervening years, has grown sophisticated, and she writes now, less from the freshness and compulsion of spontaneity and rather more from the assurance of her mature craftsmanship. Tagore in his *Mukta-Dhara* and Bhabani Bhattacharya in *Shadow from Ladakh*, have sharply focussed the confrontation between material (or technological) and human (or traditional) values, but the theme is no doubt capable of being handled with endless variety. In Markandaya's novel, a British engineering firm partnered by Clinton and Mackendrick set out to build a dam across a South Indian river. The British technicians are assisted by Indian engineers like Krishnan and local technicians and labourers. The tribesmen who had occupied the site near the proposed dam have had to be persuaded to shift to a less convenient place. One of the tribals, Bashiam, works with the company as a technician, as a crane-operator. The small British colony includes Helen, who is Clinton's wife, and Millie Rawlings, the chief engineer's wife. The new township and the shifted tribal settlement: Clinton incarnating the township's ideal of ruthless efficiency, the aged tribal chief symbolising an old world poise and wisdom—here's confrontation indeed. And Helen is drawn towards the tribals, their chief and, above all, Bashiam; and Bashiam is more than impressed by the uncanny efficiency of the machine, he is ready to accept the values that Clinton stands for, yet he can hardly resist Helen's advances. As the story unfolds, Clinton and Helen drift apart, and she gives herself to Bashiam. When she finds him reeling in his uncertainty, she quickly reassures him with this ardent declaration:

"Look at me. I've never been a memsahib. You're not some kind of freak to me. We're alike, we're freaks only to the caste we come from, not to each other."

In the author's own comment some pages earlier, "there was an acreage of common rebellion which both were stimulated by and respected in each other".

The tribal headman is understandably full of forebodings. His men are being easily seduced by offers of jobs. He is afraid that before the Great Dam is finished "the man-eater (the river) will have its flesh" a score or more! For Clinton, the completion of the dam according to the agreed schedule is the main thing. What the tribals think or feel is nothing to him. He is armed with blue-prints, time-schedules and statistics. But Bashiam—and even Krishnan—know better. Monsoon in India and the behaviour of the rivers are not simply to be taken for granted. Nature in India is *not* to be mocked! And sure enough there are setbacks that have not been provided for. Once when the charges of dynamite are laid to split the rock and make the river turn as required and flow over its new bed, something goes wrong; the warning signals don't work, the blast itself is premature; and forty men, most of them tribals, are killed, and two of the dead are caught in the river. "Their bodies can be incorporated. Into the structure", says Clinton. But the tribal hands say that they will not work "until the bodies of our dead are returned to us. So that the rites may be correctly performed, and their souls depart in peace". Krishnan's men join in the demand, and Helen too is with them. Clinton has no option but to yield, and Bashiam is asked to operate the newly installed Avery-Kent crane to lift the boulder and release the trapped corpses. Driven by a sense of fatality, Bashiam does the job indeed, but the crane being defective, it falls across land and water, and involves Bashiam in its fall. He barely escapes death, and although not his old self, he hopes to be employed again. Helen too survives the shock and charges her husband pointedly: "He (Bashiam) was not told, and could not know, since it was a concealed defect (in the crane)". Had Clinton, out of jealousy, deliberately laid the trap? Had Bashiam, out of a vague sense of guilt, half-deliberately walked into the trap?

One more crisis builds up with the coming of the monsoon. The water level rises steadily, and very soon—if the rains do not stop and the cofferdams not breached—the river may burst its bonds and drown the tribals in the land-basin. Clinton will not coun-

tenance the possibility of having to destroy the coffers, the dam itself, even to save the tribals' lives. In despair, Helen and Mackendrick seek guidance from the dying tribal chief, but he breathes his last speaking the words "when the ridges clear. . . ." And the ridges do clear by morning, the water levels fall, and the Great Dam is safe.

While the central human drama comprising Helen, Clinton and Bashiam seldom recedes to the background, the other figures (Mackendrick, Millie, Rawlings, Krishnan, the tribal chief) have their roles too, and the evocation of the atmosphere is masterly. There is a quiet efficiency in the technical descriptions, and there is an eerie quality in the early-morning adventure in bird-catching. Kamala Markandaya writes with increasing mastery of the medium, and although there is some obvious contriving and some ingenious formulations of contrast, the novel as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of modern technological ruthlessness against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life. The tribal chief is dead,—is the old order, the primordial wisdom, dead with him too?

Not the least of Kamala Markandaya's marks as a novelist is the sufficiency and suggestiveness of her prose: for example (from *Nectar in a Sieve*):

Rain had softened the road, liquid mud came squelching up between my toes as I walked. Ahead and behind me were scores of foot-prints, many of them like small pools where water had seeped in. The cart-tracks were full of water too, long lines criss-crossing with mud flung up on either side of the trenches...

Or, this from *Some Inner Fury* :

I think in that moment I first knew the meaning of fear. I could feel its slow black coils unwinding, felt the sudden hollowness of my body as all else retreated before that creeping darkness...

Or, this from *Possession*:

...I saw the look on Valmiki's face, the thankful look of people who find that matters have been taken out of their hands, giving them rest from action and decision—the ailing animal dead, the abortion performed, the unwanted old certified and lodged.

And this from *A Handful of Rice*:

It was only afterwards, months later, after Nalini had come, that it occurred to him to wonder if the disaster so narrowly averted would not in fact have been a blessing. It was a brief thought, flickering pale and evil through his mind before he stamped on it; but it left behind a turmoil, a sick self-hatred that made him savagely question his fitness to be assigned the dignity of a human being.

Walking in rain or experiencing fear, the sense of secret shame or guilt, love or revolution, fulfilment or frustration, stillness or pandemonium, the right no-nonsense words evoke the scene, the feeling, the action or the psychological state. In her first two novels, the heroine tells the story; in *Possession*, one of the minor characters, Anasuya, is the narrator; in *A Handful of Rice*, this Marlovian ruse is dispensed with and we have straightforward recital by the 'omniscient' novelist. Kamala Markandaya neither repeats herself, nor turns her fiction into a formula. Here in her last two novels the theme is nothing less than the "quiet desperation" (Thoreau's phrase) in which most people in city or the country are condemned to live and the pettiness and the horror, the pity and the heroism, that come into play in their lives.

In the course of a little over a decade, Mrs. Ruth Praver Jhabvala has published six novels — *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) and *A Backward Place* (1965) — and two collections of short stories, *Like Birds, Like Fishes* (1963) and *A Stronger Climate* (1968). Born in Germany of Polish parents, she came to England in 1939 when she was twelve, and took an M.A. degree at the London University; and having married an Indian architect in 1951, she has since settled down in Delhi. Mrs. Jhabvala is the Indian — or Indo-Anglian — approximation to Joseph Conrad, but hers is a feminine contemporary urban sensibility in contrast to that of the masculine Victorian novelist of the sea and of lands beyond the seas. Living in Delhi in the years after independence, Mrs. Jhabvala has had opportunities of exercising her powers of close observation on a milieu that changes chameleon-like from local to cosmopolitan, from

traditional to conventional, from naive to sophisticated; only, sometimes one hardly knows which is which! In Delhi the Unreal City, there is such a confusion of categories, such a jumbling of modes, such a pot-pourri of manners, customs, poses, affectations and attitudinisations that one cannot say for certain whether one is dreaming or awake. During the last twenty years there has been witnessed a population explosion in Delhi more alarming even than in other Indian cities, and there are today many more foreigners — who also form, perhaps, a higher percentage of the population — than in the days of the British Raj. Numerous are the foreign Embassies, numerous the international Agencies, numerous the Foundations, numerous the cultural centres, clubs and groups, and numerous the corridors of espionage, intrigue and power. The go-getters (whether in business or in Government), the culture sharks and the culture hacks, the survivals from the past and the rootless stargazers, the smart sets and the spiritual cults, the grouseers, the anarchists, the whimsies, the ecstasies — all find shelter in hospitable Delhi. What an invitation to the novelist who is endowed with endless curiosity as well as acute powers of observation!

The double event of independence and partition has given Delhi a character that it couldn't have developed otherwise. The ill-fated partition uprooted millions from their homesteads, and hundreds of thousands of Hindu and Sikh refugees came to Delhi and have since accomplished the miracle of self-rehabilitation in a new environment. Making a reference to this, Mrs. Jhabvala writes in her first novel, *To Whom She Will*:

They had lost almost everything: their houses, their businesses, many of their valuables, all had to be left behind. It was complete disaster, absolute ruin: if it had happened to one man alone it would have been unbearable. But there is consolation in numbers, and there were hundreds of thousands of them. Their relatives, their friends, their neighbours, all were ruined with them, all had to start life afresh: there was no individual disgrace attached to this ruin: it was spiritually bearable. And like almost all Punjabis, they were resourceful, courageous, intensely practical people who faced their situation squarely: there was no help for it, and they had to earn their living; so they started again. They did not care how small or humble were their beginnings, and they worked hard. Within three or four years

they were almost where they had been before, and some of them had even bettered themselves.

Delhi remains the capital city, and hence a cosmopolitan city, and the Parkinsonian growth in the Union Government services has provided opportunities for people from all over the country to come to Delhi to make it very nearly "an effete little empire of clerks and civil servants". On the other hand, its geographical location and the aftermath of the partition have given to Delhi a native Uttar Pradesh complexion with superimposed Punjabi patches of rouge. Again, before independence, Old and New Delhi were distinct, and had their distinctive, personalities. That obvious clarity in contrast is gone, apparently for ever. The terrific expansion of Delhi in all directions, and the springing up of so many Nagars, Enclaves and Colonies, have made the Delhi of today a Complexcity or Multicity than a mere city. The Jumna no doubt winds its majestic way nearly as of old: the major landmarks — Qutub at one end, the Red Fort and Jumma Masjid in Old Delhi, and Safdarjung and Jantar Mantar in between — are still there: and there are also the massive structures of Lutyens and Baker. But numberless are the new Government offices, hostels and residential flats; and faster and faster more buildings are coming up all over the place, and the new and the old run cheek by jowl to everybody's distraction. And fashions change, and names change, and Old Delhi and New Delhi have both been swallowed up by this ever-expanding ever-exasperating Delhi that at once recalls the remote epic past of Yudhistira's Indraprasta and also looks forward to 2000 A.D. when Delhi may have become a truly nightmarish city of ten million inhabitants and 2 million motor cars.

Mrs. Jhabvala looks at life in modern Delhi with amused, yet detached, interest and she lights upon what is bizarre, what is knotted with self-deception and contradiction, what is ludicrous, what is fantastic, and occasionally — very occasionally — even what is perilously close to tragedy. Jane Austen worked wonders in her little bit of ivory, hardly two inches wide. Hers was a static society, more or less: at least it was recognisably a 'society'. The tempo of life was slow, conversation flowed at a leisurely pace in country or city, and the tenor of human life

was not bedevilled by the modern mass media or by the frenzied bustle and drive of contemporary civilized life. In contrast to Jane Austen's world, post-independence Delhi defies definition and containment, and it needs all Mrs. Jhabvala's talent for resolved limitation to locate her own chunks of ivory — less than ivory and rather more than two inches wide — and execute her exquisite comedies of urban middle class life in the nineteen fifties and sixties.

In Jane Austen's novels, husband-hunting fills an important —almost a dominant—place in the action; in Mrs. Jhabvala's, there is as much stress on wife-hunting as on husband-hunting, and it is chiefly the parents who embark, on behalf of their children, on these tortuously exasperating adventures. The traditional method of 'arranging' marriages after comparing the horoscopes of boy and girl, and taking into consideration family, status, caste, relative affluence and future prospects uneasily survives still, but it has had to make terms with unpredictable new forces like 'love at first sight' (that might ignore caste, class and race barriers) and the phenomenon of devil-may-care 'free love'. The pattern of emotional relationships in the Jhabvala world of fiction is accordingly rather more confusing than in the severely inhibited world of Jane Austen.

In *To Whom She Will*, while Amrita and Hari think they have fallen in love and desire to marry, their families have other views and succeed in marrying off Hari to Sushila Anand, and so the way is cleared at last for Amrita's marriage to Krishna. The families muddle through somehow, and all's well that ends well. This is a simple plot, uncomplicated by inter-racial or illicit relationships. But, then, *To Whom She Will* was Mrs. Jhabvala's first exercise in fiction, and indeed appeared with a glossary (one of the entries being on 'sari', with a detailed description of the way it is to be worn) followed by a list of recipes. Some readers may have even wondered whether the novel itself was not really an imaginative advertisement for the recipes! When Hari goes to his sister, Prema, he finds her, "as usual, lying on the bed eating sweets"; as he takes a sweet, she is quite expansive; "Take, take . . . It is fresh barfi, six rupees a pound". When Hari takes Amrita to Prema, there is more eating, and there are "plates heaped with sweets, huge yellow ladoos, white barfi with breath-thin silver

paper, brown gulab jamuns oozing syrup, golden rings of jalebi", and other plates filled with cashew-nuts and pistachios, with samusas, with iced cakes in green and pink. Mrs. Jhabvala's fiction is thus full of the relish of eating, especially eating sweets, and in the later novels cocktail parties alternate with traditional eating parties where Indian sweets and savouries are liberally consumed. And it is such parties that provide the appropriate background, sometimes for the forging of transient emotional ties and sometimes for the opening of discreet marriage negotiations.

In the second novel, *The Nature of Passion*, a background of sherbet-drinking and pan-chewing helps two wily men, Dev Raj and Lalaji, to throw out feelers with consummate circumspection. Lalaji desires a particular contract; Dev Raj's relative could certainly help Lalaji in the matter—but how about giving Lalaji's daughter, Nimmi, in marriage to that influential relative's son? Nothing of course is said openly; the talk is apparently all about renting out houses to foreigners (to Americans preferably) and the taste of aniseed in a pan, but the owl can infer what the jackal has in mind, and *vice versa*. It is the most enjoyable social documentation.

In *Esmond in India*, the strands of comedy, irony and satire mingle and fuse to make a fabric of fiction that teases and fascinates at once. Rejecting the very eligible Amrit, Gulab has married Esmond Stillwood who is that rare combination, a prig and a pig in one. As the big red Englishman tells Shakuntala, Esmond has "come specially to India to teach you people all about your own country". His head is full of polysyllabic Sanskrit titles, he can reel off dates (*circa*, and all that), and he is supposed to make a living by teaching Indian and world culture to young society ladies. Shakuntala, just out of college with her B.A., falls for him and throws herself into his arms. In the meantime, her father, Har Dayal, engages Esmond to give her "a good grounding in all aspects of culture, East and West . . . I believe his fees are quite reasonable, considering the excellent service he gives". In the context this is superbly—almost devastatingly—ironic. In no more than a few lines, we have quite a mini-seminar on Shakuntala:

'She talks so many words', Madhuri said, 'really one cannot tell what she means'.

'But I know it is true! She is a girl who cares too much for the refinements of life, the beauties that come with sophistication, to be able ever to give them up'. (This from Har Dayal).

'You mean', Amrit said, 'she likes good food and good clothes and plenty of servants and a car and a nice comfortable home to live in—how right you are'.

While Shakuntala is rapt in Esmond, Prof. Bhatnagar seeks an alliance for his son with her, and so does Ram Nath for his son, Narayan. And the mother, Madhuri, has her own ambitions for her daughter. As for Shakuntala herself, to be with Esmond even in the thick of the roadway is "wonderful—wonderful"! Esmond, however, plans to get away from Shakuntala, from Gulab (not knowing that *she* has already left him), get away from culture sessions with young ladies, from India's shabbiness and poverty—get away from it all and enjoy on the boat the company of the very English Betty and the exhilaration of games and tennis, and so get back to England "where there were solid grey houses, and solid grey people, and the sky was kept within decent proportions".

In Mrs. Jhabvala's later novels, the comic spirit is focussed, not on marriage-negotiations, but on the trapped married couple who either wriggle within the cage for better understanding (as in *The Householder* and in *A Backward Place*) or break loose to live their separate lives as in *Get Ready for Battle*,—the rich Gulzarilal living in sin with a widow, his wife living with her improvident brother and feeling frustrated with her efforts to find solace through social welfare activities, and both husband and wife feeling ill at ease with their worthless son, Vishnu. In one of Mrs. Jhabvala's short stories, Dev writes to Raj on a post-card: "Like birds, like fishes, so man also". Although at first Raj is unable to "fathom the meaning of this message", later he feels he should follow Dev's example, go wherever he liked, and "just be free and happy like birds and fishes". Just to be *free and happy* might be man's ideal, but how about woman? In *Esmond in India*, Ram Nath tells his sister Uma:

'So like animals, like cows . . . Beat them, starve them, maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend themselves, saying "do with me what you will, you are my husband, my God, it is my duty to submit to my God"'. .

Like birds, like fishes, so man also; like animals, like cows, even so woman! These are pointed statements and might serve as epigraphs to Mrs. Jhabvala's fiction as a whole.

Married life poses problems in any case and there may be room for grouching (like Lakshmi's about her idealist husband, Ram Nath) even after a lifetime spent together. Unlike Ram Nath, Gulzarilal of *Get Ready for Battle* is too much of a materialist, and his wife, the idealistic Sarala, cannot abide him. It is extraordinary that a girl like Gulab should have defied her people and married Esmond, but having married him she stands his taunts and insolences and infidelities, and bears a son to him. She is presented as a weak and indolent woman, always eating and always sleeping; yet it is her innate strength of character that splendidly scores in the end. With sudden determination she decides to return to her mother's house; and she doesn't care even to shut the door of her husband's flat: "She left the door open, for the flat meant nothing to her any more; it was dead, finished, so how could she be expected to shut the door and lock it and worry about Esmond's possessions"!

In *The Householder*, the newly married couple, Prem and Indu, start with rudimentary cross-fire; when he says, "I have forbidden you", she flares up, "Who are you to forbid me?", and snorts and stamps her foot. But, after all, they are of a piece, and irritations like not having money enough or the presence of a mother-in-law can be overcome in course of time, especially when people are young and the future is all before them. As she leaves for Bangalore to join her daughter, Prem's mother is profusely apologetic about leaving him and Indu so soon, but *they* are transcendently happy because they will now be "alone and supreme". There is some gentle irony in the conversation between mother and son, but such is the way of the world; and, at any rate, Prem is now enabled to graduate as a 'householder'.

The domestic scene in *A Backward Place* is superficially the reverse of the one in *Esmond in India*, for here an English girl, Judy, is married to Bal, so handsome, so full of plans that come to nothing, so improvident, so impossible. But Judy does her best to sustain him and their children, and sustain the marriage as well. She chafes, she sulks, she fumes; how irresponsible are Bal, Bhuaji, and all these people—"English people didn't behave like that,

they didn't on the whim of the moment give up everything they had and go wandering off in search of no one knew what"; yet in the end she submits to her fate, so like an animal, like a cow!

Even though a couple may be long and apparently happily married, there could be an unperceived or only half-understood emptiness in the relationship; at least a lack of essential rapport. Har Dayal and Madhuri, for example; islands, not a continent. In *To Whom She Will*, Prema's marriage to Suri is no marriage of minds, and she has to seek consolation in sweets and sentimental novelettes. In the same novel, Tarla develops a passion for Ladies' Committees to overcome the shortcomings of her marriage. For much the same reason, Mrs. Kaul in *A Backward Place* gets engrossed in her Cultural Dais. She is like "a bird in a gilded cage" (her own words), and with Mr. Kaul busy all day in his office, the children in a boarding school ("naturally, one wanted only the best for one's children"),—"who was there for her? who needed her?"

In some of her short stories, Mrs. Jhabvala probes the mind, the sensibility, the agitated heart of the lonely or trapped woman. In 'The Widow', Durga the young rich widow struggles for a while unavailingly against her fate before she resignedly accepts her lot in life and decides to live barely and humbly. In 'The Man with the Dog', another widow, an old woman and a grandmother, develops for the aged Boekelman, a Dutchman that great all-devouring love that she should have for God alone. In another story, Lekha who is married to an elderly widower and respects him is suddenly swept off her feet by love, and is as suddenly left high and dry to live in memories alone. Peggy of 'The Aliens' is married to Dev, but life in the Hindu joint family irks her, her "in-laws" are after all "aliens" to her, and even of Dev she is not quite sure. Cathy of 'The Young Couple' is married to Naraian but feels likewise trapped in an uncongenial situation. From excitement to indifference, from indifference to boredom, from boredom to bickering—Cathy and Naraian might be "two ruffled birds in a cage". And she needs must agree at last to shed her individuality and become a part of her husband's "large well-fed family".

While Mrs. Jhabvala is unfailingly perceptive when she describes the domestic scene, she is equally—or even more—successful

in portraying the foreigner in India. Girls like Judy and Peggy, married to Indian husbands whom they love, find it difficult enough to accept wholly this "continent of Circe" and the ways of its inhabitants. But they learn at last to accept their fate and make the most of it. There are numerous other foreigners in Delhi, some of whom are mere birds of passage like tourists or people on short-term assignments, some are the 'seekers' who hope to find in the "stronger climate" of India what Europe cannot give them, and some are the 'sufferers' who have been too long in India and can neither find peace here nor make up their minds to return to Europe. In the very first novel, there is Prof. Hoch; "he had lived in India for twenty-five years and prided himself on his Hindustani though he had never yet realised that his German accent rendered it unintelligible". He is a student of Indian art and "a most enthusiastic exponent of 5000 years of Cultural Heritage". Hans Loewe in *The Householder* does yogic exercises, feels Him moving at the base of his spine, and wants "to cry like a little child cries when it sees its mother". In *A Backward Place*, there is the fantastic Clarissa who admits she is "mad . . . completely crackers"; she had come to India

. . . intent on a quest in which notions of soul and God played a prominent, if vague part; and how valiantly she had kept up this quest, or at least the pretence of it, though she was getting older year by year, and lonelier, and more ridiculous, and soul and God perhaps no nearer.

There is also the Hungarian, the incredible Etta, now in her middle forties and an ex-wife many times over, "a person of international culture"; she has long been in India and has managed to live well by taking "occasional, very high-class jobs", and also thanks to the bounty of her admirers:

All good things, however, come to an end, and here was Etta. . . . She was still the same—her hair as blonde, her manner as lively—but the admirers were fewer, and fatter, and less ardent.

The two girls, Christine and Betsy, of the short story 'Passion' are Ettas with a difference—much younger, and much less given to poses of sophistication. They have both Indian lovers, and Betsy at least is prepared to give up everything for her worthless lover's

sake. In another story, Lily a monitor at the AIR has a succession of Indian lovers, and she will neither stop complaining nor stop hoping. Ageing Miss Tuhy of 'Miss Sahib' has spent her life-time in India teaching and loving her pupils, and now tries to feel at home in her present shabby surroundings. Answering the call of the spirit, the girls Daphne and Helga have come to an Ashram in India, and are engaged in an intense meditation course under the guidance of Swamiji who is "always fresh and bright as a bridegroom". There are satiric nuances in this story ('A Spiritual Call'), and the situation and the characterization could be dismissed as merely amusing were it not for the fact that actuality in India might conceivably be stranger than all this fiction.

There are, then, the "eccentrics" among the men, people who have opted for things Indian, people who have lost their hearts to Indian girls (like 'Richard in 'In Love with a Beautiful Girl'), people who wish to collect materials for writing a book on India or on an Indian leader, or people like Dr. Ernst who have finally taken the plunge and become Indian citizens. Yet, for all his sincere effort to feel and act Indian, Dr. Ernst remains an odd man out and it is at Maiska's place that he suddenly feels "proud and European and full of affection for Maiska and Lily, co-heirs with him of a wondrous heritage—Mozart! Versailles! Goethe's Weimar!" As a general summing-up, this passage from 'The Man with the Dog' seems to come very close to the truth about the foreigners who have been too long in "this stronger climate" and have now become a world within a world:

They have all of them been in India for many, many years—twenty-five, thirty—but I know they would very much rather be somewhere else. They only stay here because they feel too old to go anywhere else and start a new life. They came here for different reasons—some because they were married to Indians, some to do business, others as refugees and because they couldn't get a visa for anywhere else. None of them has ever tried to learn any Hindi or to get to know anything about our India. They have some Indian 'friends', but they are all very rich and important people—like maharanis and cabinet ministers, they don't trouble with ordinary people at all. But really they are only friends with one another, and they always like each other's company best. That doesn't mean they don't quarrel. . . .

This is not Mrs. Jhabvala but one of her woman characters speak-

ing, yet the old lady does seem to have grasped a great deal of the truth. And, of course, this must be broadly true of foreigners anywhere.

In the world of Mrs. Jhabvala's fiction, human beings appear always a little bit ludicrous, but some people, some situations, are more intrinsically funny than others. By delicately exposing human follies, foibles and self-deceptions, Mrs. Jhabvala makes us laugh, or at least smile. To Lalaji (in *The Nature of Passion*) "bribery and corruption . . . were foreign words . . . and the ideas behind them were also foreign. Here in India . . . one did not know such words. Giving presents and gratifications to Government officers was an indispensable courtesy and a respectable, civilised way of carrying on business". To his son, Chandra Prakash and his young wife, although the father's manners and business methods are odious, his money is most welcome. Mrs. Jhabvala is quite an expert in isolating Delhi's 'Forsytes', studying them under her microscope, and presenting to the world at large the interesting results of her scrutiny. There is also a stainless-steel quality about her prose writing which—whether she writes as an omniscient author in the third person or makes the writing the vehicle for the expression of a particular character's sensibility or insensibility (as in 'Lekha', 'The Man with the Dog' or 'My First Marriage')—always does the job required of it. The pathetic rootlessness of the foreigner in India and the tragi-comic rootlessness of the Indian who has become too Westernized to feel at home with his own people, the singular drama of confrontation between the old and the new, the alien and the native, the national habit of constant glorification of our Great Culture, our Beautiful Culture, our Great History, and our sustained denigration of the present, all invite Mrs. Jhabvala's amused attention and precise observation, but there is no malice or even deliberate distortion in the portraiture, and there is the touch of compassion that humanizes even the most ironic situations or the most satiric portraits. In the last pages of *Esmond in India*, we see the whole plight of Shakuntala in a way she cannot see for herself, at least not yet; her parents, her brother, her lover, none of them can do anything for her; she needs must set right her bruised heart and broken life, and learn diligently to work out her salvation in her own way—perhaps only Gulab can help her! We don't simply say "Serves her right!", and

that is how Mrs. Jhabvala's compassion redeems even Shakuntala. In the short story 'The Award', Dev Prakash nostalgically thinks of Hampstead and Chelsea; the young college lecturer plies the great author with questions to elicit matter for a Ph.D. thesis in progress ("If I get Ph.D., I can become senior lecturer and get a salary of Rs. 650 rising to Rs. 900"); Aruna is all excitement because Dev has won the Akademi award; and his sister Usha is proud and practical. Ah, such is life; and although one is amused, one understands too. We may smile, we may feel exasperated, we may even feel repelled for a moment, yet we don't say "Serves him right!" or "Serves her right!" about Dev Prakash or about Nilima of 'Like Birds, Like Fishes', or about Clarissa, or about Etta. They are all trapped in situations not wholly of their own making, they are caged behind the bars of their own *swabhava*, and although they do wriggle sometimes, although they do whimper or give vent to self-pity, they know that they are prisoners of certain predicaments which they are too powerless to break through. We too realize at last that it is not for us to judge them; we can only do our best to understand them. Mrs. Jhabvala is no sentimentalist, and hence doesn't falsify or merely idealize life. But she is human enough to feel the heart-ache at the heart of humanity, and it is this that finally defines the quality of her engagingly entertaining art as the consummate portraitist of social life in Delhi.

While Kamala Markandaya and Prawer Jhabvala are the two major women novelists, each with an impressive corpus of fiction to her credit, there are some other novelists too, each with her own distinctive talent, her particular range of interests, even her individual style. We shall turn to some of these novelists in the following pages.

Miss Attia Hosain's novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), and her earlier collection of short stories, *Phoenix Fled* (1953), gave evidence of a talent for reminiscence and sensitive observation that doesn't seem to have been exploited since to the full. The title story in the collection starts with the description of an old woman and suddenly works up to evoke the horror of the partition when neighbours turned murderers, and villagers who had once feared the arrival of soldiers now dreaded their departure:

When the dread moment was upon them naked of their disguising Lopes, they remembered only the urgency of their frenzied need to escape. Terror silenced the women's wails, tore their thoughts from possessions left behind; it smothered the children's whimpering and drove all words from men's tongues but Hurry, Hurry.

But the old woman refuses to go with the rest, merely telling them: "I am old, I am feeble. I shall slow your flight. It is the children you must save". The shocks to which a bride brought up in a traditional home is exposed when she attends a drink and dance party is the theme of 'The First Party'. "Shy little thing, isn't she, but charming", they say, meaning thereby that she is something of a savage, something country-bred and dull. In 'The Street of the Moon', an elderly widower weds a girl-wife who promptly takes her step-son as her lover; and so starts the wanton's progress that lands her at last on the streets where one evening her ex-husband sees her and is shocked back to sanity. In another story, a soldier returning to his wife after many years, with a fibre suitcase full of presents, feels nevertheless that she is like a stranger to him and so walks out of their bedroom, leaving her alone to have a cry. And so on, in story after story there is one moment of poignant truth, and it is this that makes the fiction leap to life. The surprise that satisfies, the unexpected that rings true! In 'Gossamer Thread', the "simple, immature" wife—"decorative enough and submissive enough"—acts with more resolution, humanity and courage than the "progressive" husband fed on books and theories. The attachment amounting to faith that an unlettered sweeper boy can develop for a dog is the theme of 'Ramu', one of the best in the collection. Life is placid enough, human beings are prosaic enough, yet now and then there is a spark, a touch of poetry, a cry of pain, and these are the inspiration behind Attia Hosain's short stories.

The very qualities that gave distinction to her short stories seem to have stood in the way of Attia Hosain's structuring a full-length novel. Cast in the autobiographical form, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a novel in four Parts and covers a period of about 20 years in the life of Laila the narrator-heroine. When the novel begins she is fifteen; at the beginning of Part II, she is almost nineteen; and towards the end of the narrative we

find her a mother and a widow, "and the second half of a century was now two years old". An orphan, Laila is brought up by her rich relatives, and she spends the impressionable years of her girlhood in Lucknow, keeping terms in the University, making friends, dreaming dreams. Belonging as she does to an influential Muslim Taluqdar family, she is half-distracted by the politics of the thirties, the nationalists being ranged against the alien bureaucracy, and the Muslim Leaguers against the Congress. Even homes are divided, and the acerbity of politics enters the dining table, and father and son are in opposite camps:

No one seemed to talk any more; everyone argued, and not in the graceful tradition of our city where conversation was treated as a fine art, words were loved as mediums of artistic expression, and verbal battles were enjoyed as much as any delicate, scintillating, sparkling display of pyrotechnic skill. It was as if someone had sneaked in live ammunition among the fireworks.

Laila herself is more an interested observer than an active participant, and having in the meantime fallen in love with Ameer, she marries him unmindful of the family's disapproval of her choice. Ameer joins the Army in 1942, is taken prisoner, and is killed when he tries to escape. "I lived and moved through an endless tunnel with no exit", says Leila recalling that anguished time, but she has her daughter, and so she learns to fight despair and come to terms with life.

After the coming of independence doubled with partition Leila revisits Ashiana the home of her childhood and girlhood and finds that things are not what they were in her time:

There were strangers living in the rooms once so private and guarded, strangers who were names in Government files balancing Saleem's name against theirs—he labelled 'evacuee', they 'refugees'. Their presence here, and Saleem's in their erstwhile homeland, was part of a statistical calculation in the bargaining of bureaucrats and politicians, in which millions of uprooted human beings became just numerical figures. The official words describing them had no meaning in terms of human heartache.

Of her two cousin brothers, Saleem has opted for Pakistan,

while Kemal remains an Indian citizen. New times bring new fashions, new fads; "European and American aesthetes and intellectuals and the 'smart set' of Bombay and Delhi had discovered the art and culture of ancient India simultaneously. It appeared at times that neo-Indians wore their nationalism like a mask, and their Indianness like fancy dress".

In the twenty years that witness Laila changing from an orphan girl of fifteen to the widowed mother of a girl of that age, India too moves from colonialism to independence; and the old feudal order loses its property, privileges and poise, and old-world habits and attitudes give place to the exertions and frustrations of the post-independence era. There is valuable social and political documentation in the novel, and Attia Hosain writes with a feeling for places, events and words. What the novel lacks is tightness of texture, a dramatic action and not simply a sweeping sense of drama, and the impression of inevitability in the interaction between character and action.

In her two novels—*Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965)—Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction. In Praver Jhabvala's work the social background is rather more important than the characters who enact the various comedies, tragi-comedies and farces; in Kamala Markandaya's, the accent is as much on the principal characters as on the divers backgrounds, economic, political, cultural, social; but in Anita Desai's two novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. Her forte, in other words, is the exploration of sensibility—the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amorlists. Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters. The intolerable grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions is necessarily reflected in the language, syntax and imagery, yet the reader's first impression on reading Anita Desai's novels may

very well be that the contortions are too many, and are often the result of excessive cerebration on the author's part and not always determined by the movements in the consciousness of the characters. Nevertheless, Anita Desai's is an original talent that has the courage to go its own way, and her two novels carry a burden of rich promise as well as the marks of present achievement.

Cry, the Peacock is Maya's story, the story of her married life with Gautama; and almost the entire story is "remembrance of things past" by Maya herself. The opening pages (Part I) about the scavenging truck carrying away Maya's dead dog, and the last few pages (Part III) describing what happens after the death of Gautama, are in the third person, while the whole of Part II, which is the main central block of the novel, is Maya's memory and sensibility trying to achieve recordation and definition. The 'action' of the novel is located in Delhi, but the city's presence is neither obtrusive nor obsessive. There are references to places, no doubt—Birla Mandir, "the still, brooding Old Delhi garden", the Ridge, "that rocky wasteland", the crumbling Moghul ruins, as also "the streets alive with bicycles and pedestrians, the clamorous bazaars, the Red Fort's rose-red walls swooning in dull fulvous dust, the minarets of Jama Masjid rising like a muezzin's call to prayer into a sky of heavy, grey-tinged pearl, and people lying in the shade of trees on the ghost-swept *maidan*"—but the sense of inner space, with its deceptive half-lights and the brooding darkness, is more potent than the phantasmagoric outer forms, shadows, noises and silences.

Over the whole narrative in *Cry, the Peacock*, which is really Maya's effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself, over the whole narrative there hovers an uncannily oppressive sense of fatality. The novel begins with the death of Maya's pet dog, Toto, and how it affects her; "something slipped in my tear-hazed vision", she says, "a shadowy something that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced, and filled me with ~~the~~ despair". Her husband, Gautama, is a busy, prosperous, middle-aged lawyer. Kindly, cultured, rational, practical, he is too much engrossed in

his own affairs to meet the demands, partly temperamental, partly spiritual, of his young wife. Once he actually charges her with a father-fixation; wasn't that why she had agreed to marry an elderly husband? The solitude and silence of the house preys upon her, and the death of the pet dog starts a chain of reminiscence and reverie and, with startling suddenness, an eerie bit of experience, long buried under the load of the years, is thrown up like lava and glares at her in all its alienness and fury. As a girl she had gone with her *ayah* to an astrologer with albino eyes, and he had prophesied unnatural death four years after her marriage to either husband or wife! "And four years it was now. we had been married four years. . . . I knew the time had come. It was now to be either Gautama, or I". This long-forgotten, but now newly remembered, prophecy acts upon Maya with the same force of inevitability as the prophecy of the Witches acts upon Macbeth. The thing is as good as decreed, and the fourth year has come. In another context, Gautama breezily dismisses the possibility of stars influencing human lives, but far from reassuring her, deep in Maya's consciousness the terror persists and paralyzes more and more the normal motions of her mind and heart. Her mother is dead, her brother Arjuna (disowned by their father) is in New York, and she herself has "fled down the corridor of years", from the embrace of protection in her dear father's house in Lucknow to the embrace of Gautama's love. But her fate has been pursuing her all the time, and "the final, the decisive" year has her in its grip. Neither Gautama's nor her own family can help her now; perhaps, Gautama can—but he is too much of a prisoner in his own *swabhava* to be anxious or able to locate her trouble and rescue her from it in time. In her own eyes, she is as one doomed already.

Maya and Gautama, of course, make several attempts at serious conversation, but a nameless barrier prevents effective communication. What is real to her is shadowy to him, what are facts and hard realities to him have no interest for her. What is Truth? What, exactly, is "the truth of living?" Maya feels that, even if she should try to formulate a comprehensive answer, he wouldn't (or possibly he simply couldn't) understand her. Why, then, try to explain? Why waste words in the futile

attempt to define that very elusive thing, the quality or the flavour of existence:

Looking down at his thin face, grey and drawn upon the white pillow, it seemed to me that I was climbing a mountain from the top of which could be seen the entire world...while he, because he did not care for walks, or views, was tired from reading too much, and had matters to think out within the confines of his brain, remained behind in the dusty, enclosed cup of the small plain down below. Were I to force him to follow me, he would follow unseeing...

She gives it up; the truth of living, the quality of existence, the colour and flavour of each passing moment of life, are things to be felt, not described or explained. Maya is a girlish Mrs. Dalloway, and Anita Desai has obviously been influenced by Virginia Woolf's ideal of fiction and even by her prose style.

Three years they have lived together, Maya and Gautama, and the crucial fourth year is upon them. In his own way, he is indulgent enough and affectionate enough, and Maya learns from him the meaning of pain, the habit of reflection, and the capacity for tenderness. It is the inner spiritual contact that fails to click. The visit to the restaurant and the cabaret, the wind of reality blown in by the neighbours, by Gautama's mother and sister, or by the descent into the city's life, they are all powerless to still the storm within, or exorcise the creeping terror, the ravenous jaws of the spectre, Death. And increasing cerebration only accentuates the inner disintegration.

If one of the determining causes of Maya's tragedy is the albino astrologer's prophecy, another is the myth surrounding the peacock's cry. The peacocks are said to fight before they mate; "living, they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life". Maya's heated imagination jumbles prophecy and myth into a nightmarish certainty:

God, now I was caught in the net of the inescapable, and where lay the possibility of mercy, of release? This net was no hallucination, no. ...Am I gone insane? Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more—only death and waiting.

For one moment, in her mother-in-law's company, Maya has a fleeting saviour glimpse: "Oh to live in her world, to be of her kind! What safety, what peace!" But the in-laws leave for Calcutta, and Maya is left alone to wrestle with her ghosts. Deep in the hinterland of her consciousness, Maya decides that, even for the fulfilment of the astrologer's prophecy, her own death is not necessary; it might be Gautama's, for that matter—"I came upon that panicky thought, for the first time". There is really no escape for her now.

And one day there is a dust storm, followed by a few drops of rain; but Gautama is quite oblivious of everything. They have never been so far apart as they are this evening. They go up to the roof, each orbiting a different world. The pale moon has risen, and Maya is fascinated and bewitched; they are at the low parapet's edge, and when inadvertently Gautama moves in front of her, thereby hiding the moon from view, Maya waxes into a sudden frenzy and pushes him over the parapet to "pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom". Three days later, Gautama's mother and sister take her to her father's house at Lucknow, and it is tacitly understood that she will have to be put in an asylum. But in the course of the night, the two sane women hear a cry of horror, and they rush upstairs; the heavy white figure of the elder woman goes towards "the bright frantic one on the balcony, screaming. They met for an instant, there was silence, and then both disappeared into the dark quiet".

Although a first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* scores because Maya is at once the centre and circumference of this world. Her intensity—whether she is sane, hysterical or insane—fills the whole book and gives it form as well as life. In *Voices in the City*, the scene shifts from Delhi to Calcutta—that area of smoke and darkness, of noise and squalor, of disease and death. It is this "devil city"; Janus-faced, "one rapacious, one weary", corrupt, commercial Calcutta, a city of crowds, now passive and depressed, now sullen and angry with "an anger that broods and festers like a pus-filled boil"; Calcutta, city of Kali, "Goddess of Death"! But although the sense, shape and smell of Calcutta are sought to be evoked with some particularity, it is again the inner climate that is important, and that seems to

follow its own cycle of seasons, not very much influenced by the outer conditions. The Maya-Gautama tragedy is reenacted in the Monisha-Jiban marriage, for Monisha commits suicide unable to stand the strain of living in her husband's house. Monisha's brother, Nirode, and her sister, Amla, are also in Calcutta, and the greater part of the novel is devoted to Nirode's experiments with failure. There is here no albino astrologer entangling these creatures of futility in a web of fate; they are largely self-afflicted, self-driven, self-condemned to crash in defeat and disaster. "I want to move from failure to failure to failure", Nirode tells David, "step by step to rock bottom. I want to explore that depth". Even if you laboriously climb to the top, he argues, there is only space, and "all you can do is to leap off—fall to the bottom". Why not cut out the meaningless ascent, and make the descent straightaway? If Nirode thus claims the absolute freedom to fail, his friend, the prosperous Jit, hankers after the bliss of humiliation. And all the misfits and all the nonconformists gravitate to the coffee house—"notorious gathering-place of the dangerous literates of Bengal". Everywhere we hear only the hopeless wailing of the helpless, or the moan of the dying, or the mute stare of the dead.

Early in the novel, when he receives a letter from his mother, Nirode reacts cynically: "like a warm, enveloping succubus in the shape of a bright-winged butterfly..." If Maya has a father-fixation, perhaps Nirode has a mother-fixation. He is jealous of Major Chadha, and when, after Monisha's death, he goes to receive his mother at the airport, he is so fascinated by her beauty that he needs must embrace and cling to her. It is Monisha's death, of course, that brings the family together. Isn't all life but a preparation for death? For Nirode, Monisha's suicide has "too great a value to forego out of distress or guilt or deceit, but the very key of all grace, all design in life, the very essence of it, exquisite and irreducible". When later Amla and Nirode feel shut out by their mother, brother tells sister that the mother is Kali herself, feeling satisfied and fulfilled because of Monisha's death. Amla protests, but Nirode goes on: "Don't you see, in her face, in her beauty, Amla, don't you see, the amalgamation of death and life? Isn't it perfect and inevitable that she should pour blood into our veins when we are born, and drain it from

us when we die?" When his soul sister, Monisha, is gone to explore the shadows, what can Nirode do except follow her, sooner or later? "I am sentenced to death, too, now", says Nirode, "I have heard her approach—death Kali . . . She is waiting, can't you see?" And as if in answer, "they saw a white figure step out on to the upper veranda, stand silently at the rail, and watch them".

Voices in the City, although its canvas is larger, the detail fuller and the diction richer, is nevertheless less satisfying than *Cry, the Peacock*, because it is not contained by a single sensibility like Maya's in the earlier novel. Anita Desai is surer with Maya, Monisha or even Amla than with Nirode, Jit or Dharma. The double identification of Nirode's mother with Kali, and Kali with Death, seems an imposition more than an organic relationship to the action and characterization. The central insight is that Calcutta the city of noises and muffled voices, the city teeming with the meaningless riot of life, is really the city of Death; Kali the Mother is also Annihilation. For this meaning to come through, Anita Desai has found it necessary to explore the inner as well as the outer climate, and to disperse the narration in the flow of several sensibilities. What is wanting is the controlling art that contains and gives form and unifying impression to the pressures of dispersion. In *Cry, the Peacock*, the sharp Maya-Gautama polarization and the double force of the prophecy and the symbolism of the peacock's love-death cry manage admirably to hold the novel together. *Voices in the City*, on the other hand, lacks such controlling forces, and the novel, for all its powerful articulation, leaves an impression of incompleteness behind, of action and characterization, idea and symbol, not being fully integrated into artistic form. In her latest novel, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971), Anita Desai moves out of familiar Delhi and Calcutta, and vividly projects the prison—physical and psychological—in which the coloured immigrant in Britain is caught, both the difficulties of adjustment there and those of return to India.

Of the other women novelists, Shakuntala Shrinagesh published in 1955 a book somewhat out of the ordinary, *The Little Black Box*, in which the story is presented in the form of a diary by the narrator-heroine, Sarla. In his great novel, *The*

Knot of Vipers, Francois Mauriac has given us a terrifyingly revealing picture of what family life can become when love and trust are replaced by self-interest, suspicion and intrigue. On his 68th birthday, Louis starts his letter or diary, and he dies in the middle of a sentence. His family are after his money, and resentment wells up in him; his mind is warped almost,—he plans a total 'act of vengeance'! But of course things do not happen as he plans, and even such an 'ogre' as Louis is ultimately redeemed by Grace. Sarla of *The Little Black Box* is young, unmarried, inexperienced, and a woman; but she shares with Louis a sense of persecution by the family, and her mind—like Louis'—is far from normal, it is clearly neurotic. Fleeing from her family, she is forced by her illness to spend several months in a hospital. The sickness of the body exacerbates the sickness of the mind, and her constant preoccupation is with her 'little black box' containing all her wealth. When the doctors pronounce the verdict that she has no more than a month to live, her family has to be summoned: her aunt, her two sisters, her brother. She dwells upon the past, and the circumstances of her estrangement from her family; fact and fancy fuse into horrifying spectres, and the certainty of her own death and the need to leave her money to somebody cause her intense anguish. Thoughts of 'revenge' alternate with thoughts less bitter, and at last she decides to leave her money to little Nimmi, her brother's daughter, who is uninvolved in the past and is symbolic of innocence and grace. *The Little Black Box* is a morbid novel, and it is sad that a woman so young as Sarla should live so much on a diet of resentment and bitterness. The nurse and the doctor, being outside the family, start the process of her recovery, and Nimmi unconsciously lends her hand too. Like Louis in *The Knot of Vipers*, Sarla too is redeemed in the end.

Santha Rama Rau has a number of travel books to her credit—*Home to India*, *East of Home*, *My Russian Journey* and *Gifts of Passage*—and she has also made a successful dramatic version of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1960). Her only novel, *Remember the House* (1956), rings true because she writes of things well within the range of her experience. Childhood and girlhood at Jalnabad are recapitulated with sensitiveness though

not with an accession of sentimentality. One outgrows one's childhood, and inevitably life makes its demands on the narrator-heroine, Baba. She meets Nicky and Alix, she dallies with romance till she sees at last that her hero has but feet of clay. Love,—what is love? Love is a glittering and transient emptiness; "a little excitement, a little impatience, much imagination". The comfortable Hari is to be preferred to the princes of the romantic mirage. Baba comes to feel that the West cannot easily mix with the East, and she sees too that traditional cultures have the hidden innate strength to stand shocks from the outside; and her progress from adhesion to romantic tinsel to the calm appreciation of the need for security and commonsense is presented as something natural as well as commendable. Santha Rama Rau's writing has an ease and urbanity appropriate to the theme, and she explores and exposes ever so gently the dividing gulf between the East and the West.

A daughter of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nayantara Sahgal has also published both fiction (*A Time to be Happy, This Time of Morning*) and non-fiction (*Prison and Chocolate Cake, From Fear Set Free*). To essay autobiography—whether veiled or unveiled—is in her blood. In her first novel, *A Time to be Happy* (1957), the hero Sanad begins by wanting to resign from the British firm of Selkirk and Lowe, and ends by forging his links stronger with the firm. The narrator says, "This is really Sanad's story"; and so indeed it is. The son of a Zamindar, Sanad joins Selkirk and Lowe at their office in Sharanpur, learns to drink and to make love, laves in the waters of sophistication, marries the worthy Kusum, and when freedom comes at last, he has the best of both worlds. Sanad has the talent to be happy, and nothing can stop him from getting on! For the rest, there is reasonable variety in incident and characterization: there is Sanad's father, Govind Narayan, the U. P. Zamindar; there is the rich Ronu Chatterji, and there is his wife, the beautiful and wicked Lalita; there is Marion Finch the girl of easy virtue; there is Sohan Bai the selfless worker who runs a home for children orphaned during the Bengal famine; and so on. There are references to Congress activities and the events of 1942, and although the tale is interesting enough, it is difficult to escape the feeling that the action and characterization haven't been

properly integrated and placed in right relation to the background.

In her more mature novel, *This Time of Morning* (1965), Nayantara Sahgal liberally draws upon her knowledge, part first-hand part hearsay, of what happens in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of politically very important people, or in the lobbies in Parliament; such knowledge must be second nature to her, for she is her mother's daughter as well as Jawaharlal Nehru's niece. Much of the action takes place in Delhi, and the particular context is the decline and fall of one of the pillars of the Government, Kalyan Sinha. As one reads the novel, and recapitulates the political events in India in the last years of Nehru's prime ministership, one cannot resist the temptation to equate some of the characters in the novel with historical figures. But of course the novel should be—and indeed deserves to be—read as a piece of fiction rather than as a slice of history. Rakesh, a junior official in the External Affairs Ministry, returns after a term abroad to Delhi, and even at Palam he scents the pace of change in the country. He is soon caught up in the whirl of politics, social life, careerism and intrigue. Personal and political ambitions criss-cross, and there are unpredictable affiliations and separations. For a time, the idealistic Nita feels drawn towards the elderly Kalyan Sinha, but they part in the end. Like Baba in *Remember the House*, Nita too opts for safety and conformity, and Kalyan Sinha is left to sulk in his tents. *This Time of Morning* is written with much greater ease and sophistication than its predecessor, and it can certainly claim to be one of the best political novels written by an Indian in English.

In her latest novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), the scene is set in the exotic city designed by Carbusier as the capital of the Indian part of the partitioned Punjab. When this State is again cut up into the Sikh-dominated Punjab and the largely Hindu State of Haryana, Chandigarh being the common capital, there is invitation to trouble from the very beginning. Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh, the chief ministers of Haryana and the Punjab respectively, had been friends and colleagues before, but are now obliged to make menacing gestures. As the tension mounts up, New Delhi deposes Vishal Dubey to watch the situation at Chandi-

garh. After a careful appraisal, Vishal backs Harpal and persuades him to accept Gyan's challenge of a general strike. Violence erupts inevitably, and Harpal is wounded and hospitalized. Just then the aged Union Home Minister dies, and discreet moves are initiated to bring the two warring State Governments to the Conference table.

Besides the political background which is very well projected, there is a human background also. Vishal's marriage had been a failure, and after his wife's death he has remained a widower, eking out a furtive satisfaction in a liaison with Gauri, a Bengali businessman's wife. At Chandigarh, Vishal develops a deeper attachment to Saroj, wife of Inder, who has an affair with Mara, wife of Jit—Inder and Jit being both in business. It is almost like a chapter from John Updike's *Couples*! Jit and Mara, however, find one another in the end, Saroj escapes to Delhi to be met there by Dubey, and the insufferable Inder is left to fend for himself. What a set!

Mrs. Sahgal's feeling for politics and her command over English are rather more impressive than her art as a novelist. There is too much contriving, and the principal characters are hardly convincing; and there are satirical patches that stand out as though they have been lifted from Mrs. Sahgal's journalism. Thus, for example, of Delhi today and its fatal lure for civil service men:

Delhi was the top drawer and once there, no official budged if he could remain, unless it was to become a state governor or an ambassador, or become the recipient of a generous international grant for work abroad. The handful of senior names, the highest in officialdom, were those of the men who circulated at the conference and cocktail parties, and lined up for the big jobs ahead. No one ever went back to the smaller canvas and the comparative obscurity of state administration. . . .

Delhi downgraded leisure. It was worse than unsought. It was not done. And retirement had become a nightmare. Few men wanted to face themselves stripped of office and rank. Far too long these had substituted for their essential lives.

Vimala Raina's *Ambapali* (1962) is an ambitious historical novel set in the ancient India of the Buddha's time. The legendary Ambapali was a celebrated dancer, as beautiful and rich as she was honoured in her Vaishali, and the first woman to be admitted into the Buddha's fold. The history of Ambapali

seems to have fascinated Vimala Raina,—“to have clamoured to be brought into life”, as she confesses in her Introduction,—and her novel is an attempt “to bring to light the live force of my country as far back as 600 B.C., and to portray its culture, religion and philosophy and the glory that was”. Had she concentrated on the life and personality of Ambapali, Vimala Raina might have succeeded in making her novel a more finished—a more articulate—work. The main story is moving enough. Although surrounded by wealthy admirers, Ambapali gives her heart to the disguised Ajat Shatru, not realizing that he is her Vaishali's enemy. Years later, King Ajat Shatru subjugates Vaishali and comes to claim her. But already she has been accepted by the Buddha, and she has nothing but scorn for the lover who had won her under false pretences and become her country's scourge. At the climactic moment, she confronts Ajat Shatru as a nun and throws him into shame and confusion with the words:

‘I welcome you to darkness and despair, Samrat of Magadh...I bring to you the offering of the defeated and the humbled. I have nothing to offer, yet I wished not to meet you empty-handed. So I bring you this’, she said, offering him the long silky tresses of her hair. ‘“A kingdom for the soft caressing fragrance of your silky hair”, someone had once said to Ambapali. He was a merchant who loved her. Her hair I bring to you, and this ring which the merchant had put on her finger ere he fled away from her to die into a monarch.’

Hers (or rather the Buddha's), and not Ajat Shatru's, is this moment of transfiguring triumph. As he had once learnt about sensual love from her, Ajat Shatru now learns to look beyond it, and this makes him humble and opens his eyes to the meaning of compassion. While the Ambapali-Ajat Shatru theme is very well worked out, this essentially human story is overlaid with a good deal of extraneous matter like philosophical discussions, the description of poison research and the details of Chandra Sena's life and death. Nevertheless, Ambapali and Ajat Shatru are very convincingly drawn, and the potency of the Buddha's spiritual power is also subtly insinuated. And Ambapali herself emerges as the Mary Magdalene of the Buddha, beautiful and bold and intense and human, and Vimala Raina

deserves all credit as much for the choice of her theme as for the portrayal of her heroine.

Love, war, politics, economic and social tensions, legendary history, the 'groves of Academe', even spirituality—all are popular with contemporary novelists. In several of his novels—and, notably, in *The Masters*—C. P. Snow has studied the politics of an Oxbridge college. *The Masters* is, in fact, concerned with the election of a new Master, and naturally all the passions and prejudices that rage in the political market-place are brought into play within the precincts of the college as well. Like the election of a new Master, the appointment of a new Headmistress can also prove an occasion for the clash of rival ambitions. And this is the theme of Mrs. Muriel Wasi's novel, *Too High for Rivalry* (1967). Mrs. Amita Choudhury, now approaching sixty, decides that she cannot continue any longer as Headmistress of St. Hilary's. She has a weak heart, and is practically under sentence of death. She is, however, anxious that she should be succeeded by somebody who would worthily carry on the traditions she had helped to foster. Who should her successor be—Aruna Das, "well-spoken, sound, calm, conscientious, a natural teacher in the traditional way"? Sarita Khanolkar, so full of vitality and "inspired, audacious, independent ideas"? Or Malti Krishnan, "an aloof but very self-possessed and sensible young woman"? It is the Governing Board of St. Hilary's that has to make the appointment, but Mrs. Choudhury has the right and the duty to advise them. But Aruna and Sarita are eliminated from the contest too easily and too soon, and Malti is appointed. And the appointment is accepted with more than good grace by her two rivals, who have their own more pressing preoccupations and are also sensible of Malti's own special qualities—judgement and poise and determination. While there is the invisible movement of change from Amita Choudhury to Malti Krishnan, life at St. Hilary's goes on as usual, and under Sarita's imaginative direction the 'Gandhian Pageant' proves a great success. Aside from the main theme of change in the headship of St. Hilary's, there is Iqbal Ansari's love for Malti which she is too much engrossed in her school to be able even to notice. And there are satirical asides and piquant obiter dicta, which do not always chime with the tone of the novel. But as a portrait

of a good girls' school in present-day Delhi, *Too High for Rivalry* deserves all praise. Also worthy of praise is the insight that Malti Krishnan has towards the end of the book. She has won 'power' at last; but how is it to be exercised? With her predecessor, it had been "the triumph of power through love" There is no other way:

...till you have the love of the children, you are an instrument only, you will not create. The only good administrators are those who create through human beings, as the only temples worth worshipping in are those not made with hands.

XXII

Other Novelists

Novelists like Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao, who achieved recognition before the second world war, have survived it, retained their impulse to creation, and greatly extended their popular appeal; and these three, and the many new arrivals, have between them succeeded in imparting to the contemporary literary scene both the stir of variegated activity and the aura of significant achievement. The work of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Praver Jhabvala and the women novelists, has already been reviewed in the two earlier chapters. We may now glance briefly at some of the other novelists.

Humayun Kabir, poet, critic and philosopher, published his novel, *Men and Rivers*, in 1945. As in the more recent *Chemmeen* of Sivasankara Pillai, there is in *Men and Rivers* also a bareness and strength, a sense of brooding fatality in human relationships, a feeling of close ineradicable kinship between man and Nature—a kinship involving birth and nurture, play and fear, danger and destruction, a kinship that can be artistically presented only as primordial romance and quintessential tragedy. Towards the end of the novel, after the hapless young lovers have been told by Asgar Mia that they are son and daughter of the same mother, Amina, there is a sudden release of the tension that had been mounting during the previous chapters. Malek, Amina's son by Nazu Mia, cannot marry Nuru, Amina's daughter by her second husband, Asgar. Nazu and Asgar had been friends in boyhood, but on Nazu 'stealing' Asgar's cousin, Amina, the friends had become bitter enemies. Amina's life with Nazu was to be branded with disappointment and misery, and after Malek's birth she was divorced and sent away by Nazu. Asgar then persuaded her to overcome her despair and accept him in marriage, and the fruit of this union

was Nuru. When Nazu Mia died leaving Malek a minor, Asgar was prevailed upon by the *panchayat* to take charge of Malek, and so both son and daughter came to live with Amina. As they grew older, Malek and Nuru—not knowing how their relationship stood—had fallen in love. Then Amina dies, and it falls to the lot of Asgar to tell them the truth. The young lovers feel stupefied and Asgar looks on helpless. Presently he finds the right words to say:

He looked at the grave of his wife and said, "We are men of the river. We are peasants. We build our homes on sand and the water washes them away. We build again and again, and we till the earth and bring the golden harvest out of the waste land".

Malek replied, "I also am a son of the river. I too must build my home on sand. But the old must die before the new can be born. I must go away, Asgar *chacha*, and who knows, perhaps one day I might return".

Asgar muttered, "The river must change its course and leave behind old familiar banks. But the river returns. It never forgets the old channels".

In *Men and Rivers*, theme and language, action and symbol, achieve a perfect fusion. The river Padma is both protective and fierce, both giver of bounty and destroyer of homes. Nazu Mia and Asgar are rugged simple peasants and basically good men, yet they are torn apart, and enmity blazes between them. The Mother of Sorrows figures as old Ayesha, Nazu's mother, and also as the saddened Amina, Malek's mother. Human passions and shortsightedness darkly clash with Nature's violent moods and blind rages, and homes are broken up, homesteads washed away—till at last calm seems to rule again. Divided into three Parts and an Epilogue, in less than 200 pages this novel covers a decade in the lives of the Nazu and Asgar families. The river is also a character, a presence and a power both, inspiring a physical passion in the people who live on her bounty or cower before her fury. The opening chapters that describe the killing of the crocodile by Nazu Mia, the abortive visit to the Hakim and the explosive visit of the Faqir, launch us easily and swiftly into the main current of the action. The Faqir's frenzied words—

Get back, get back, you fools, for on you is a great calamity, and

yet you are fighting among yourselves. The river shall rise and land and water shall be one. For Nazu Mia, I see a stormy evening when the clouds gather and the waters boil. Your best friend will be your worst enemy and your worst enemy will be your best friend. Beware, beware when the wind is from the north-east and the cloudy eagle rises in the sky. Asgar and Nazu, Nazu and Asgar—what a strange pattern of love and hatred and suffering Allah weaves for you!—

are at once inspired recapitulation of the past and an ominous forecast of the future. Like a curse that cannot be annulled, the words wing the air and all but petrify the hearers. The Faqir later pays a friendly visit to Nazu Mia, but the fatal words that had been spoken still rumble in the unconscious. The rest of the novel is merely the working out of the prophecy with remorseless precision.

The end of *Baisakh* finds the Padma 'hungry' and 'angry'. Trying to cross her, Nazu Mia meets 'death by water'. Six months after, Ayesha dies too, and Malek has to be entrusted to Asgar, notwithstanding much hesitation on his part. The river takes a hand again in the fortunes of these people, and two years of scarcity are followed by a year of threatened drought. Then one day the rains come; it more than rains, it pours, and the Padma bursts its banks and overflows the land. Asgar and Amina, Malek and Nuru, escape in one of the boats and seek their fortunes in a new place. Years pass, and the young lovers find themselves baulked of their prize. Oedipus unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. Malek has unwittingly thought of his own sister as a possible wife. A long-forgotten storm in the human heart—the swell of Nazu's desire and greed overflowing the banks of friendship and comradeship—revives in a latter-day swell to destroy the happiness of another pair of lovers, son and daughter of the one-time friends who had become estranged, and also the children of the same mother who had been the guiltless cause of the original storm. The filiations between man and Nature—the affinity and antipathy, the embrace and the murderous struggle, the storm and the calm—are seen all over the novel, and that is why *Men and Rivers* moves us as all essential tragedy moves us, striking us with a sense of awe, yet not wholly reducing us to despair. Checkmated and defeated man may be, but his spirit refuses to be crushed.

"We build again and again, and we till the earth and bring the golden harvest out of the waste land".

Sudhin N. Ghose made England his home for many years and published a series of novels revealing his unique sensibility and vision. After feeling his way in *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949), a beautiful and sensitive study of childhood, and *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), with its uncanny sense of the nuances of life in the Indian countryside, he achieved his first notable triumph in *The Vermilion Boat* (1953), a fantasy with an undercurrent of serious intention. The narrator is a student, a Bengali variation of James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus. He 'covers' Calcutta and enacts a voyage through Hell ('Behold the Idols') and Purgatory ('Of Sensuous Fires'), in the end finding his Heaven ('And Many Waters') in the arms of the long-desired and strangely attractive Anglo-Indian girl, Roma. He has a 'date' with Roma, and is waiting for her, but he is caught between two menacing crowds, one asking him to stop, the other asking him to move on—

Wolves, when hunting in packs, I have been told, know no fear. None can frighten them nor curb their ferocity till they have slaughtered their quarry and assuaged their thirst in its warm blood...

The men on both my flanks looked like such wolf packs... They appeared to me more frenzied than fierce wolves: they had the ferocity of the beasts that hunt and the cunning of the creatures that crawl...

Then it dawned upon me in a sudden flash that all these men were out for no immediate personal gain. Their objective was to set the world aright, and establish the brotherhood of man. For that high ideal they were eager to bash faces in, to crush bodies into pulp, to batter heads till brains oozed out, to gouge eyes out with their own fingers, to dig their hands in bowels ripped open, to set houses and shrines on fire, and to spread destruction and devastation everywhere.

For that purpose they had chosen a day that was sacred both to the Hindus and to the Mohammedans.

When we remember what happened during the terrible months of 1946-47, the pre-partition and post-partition horrors that swept over the sub-continent, and the more recent confrontations and explosions for all sorts of reasons, we can see in Sudhin Ghose's description no more than an image of actuality. In a

fantasy, however, a 'happy' conclusion is always possible, for Roma saves the situation merely by playing a modern Mohini between the arrayed 'Devas' and 'Asuras'. With her simulated sex-appeal and "vocabulary of obscene words", she throws the rival packs into convulsive laughter, and so the threatening clouds disperse, leaving the sky clear and serene. "Laughter", says Sudhin Ghose, "is the gift of gods to man, and not to the wolves: a crowd that laughs is a crowd of brothers, a band of God's children".

Escaping from the Hell of communal frenzy, the narrator has still to scale Purgatory's slopes. There are the sensual fires that attract and scorch, the panaceas that merely hold out promise, the crowded 'sporting houses' that only maim the soul, the raging appetites of the flesh that wax more and more with the feeding, the pitiless lure of mystery and beauty and dirt that disgusts, confuses and exhausts. But he has other gleams too, sudden visions of beauty—

'She is a shy goddess', they say. 'She shuns the throngs. Nevertheless, she never wholly forsakes them nor any realm, however wretched. For without her men would be changed into beasts'.

How true this saying is I realized the day I saw Beauty bless a group of half-naked street urchins: she made her appearance only for a moment; the instant these children suddenly rushed forward to retrieve a stray paper-kite; the pattern the boys and girls formed for just one brief second was an adornment for Urvashi's garment...

But the visions are intercepted, they are soon obliterated. There is Chumchicke Adhikari with his 'decoy women'; there is the Cut-throats' Lane; there is Prema Swami with his Way of Life; there is the Snake-Pit in the Talukdar's Palace. But there is no happiness for the narrator and Roma; "the vision of the Daughters of Mara—the phantom temptresses—continued to haunt me".

The narrator is muddled and miserable, and can neither forget Roma nor attain and retain her. He pays a visit to the shrine of the Snake Goddess, Manasa Devi, and continues and completes his symbol journey through the worlds of wastes and waters in his Vermilion Boat till at last, for the third time and this time finally, Roma redeems him—

We did not exchange a word. We sobbed in each other's arms:

we instinctively recognized a great fact that we had lost, and found each other...

I blessed my stars for the first knowledge of a joy known only to one who has ceased to be a youth: the joy that comes through winning a woman's heart and hand; the proud privilege of attaining manhood; a felicity whose existence I never knew before. I blessed the gods: in embracing Roma, I knew I was worshipping Uma...

The Yogini at the temple of the Snake Goddess Manasa had rightly told the narrator: "Fire burns and water quenches". The sensuous fires are quenched by the many waters, and the quest is ended, and this new heaven is blissful as well as holy.

The next novel, *The Flame of the Forest* (1955), is a kind of sequel to *The Vermilion Boat*. The narrator has left college though not the hostel, and is now eking out a livelihood by giving private tuitions. He has failed to get into the Civil Service ("the Sons of Belial, as a distinguished Government official has named them"), and he has been no more successful in his attempts to become a university teacher. Chance throws him into the company of Myna, who he discovers comes from his own part of the country:

She was not only from the Penhari Parganas but almost from my own native village: from a hamlet within hailing distance. Moreover, she had seen me—at a semi-religious ploughing ceremony—when I had not as much as a stitch of clothing on my back, and she herself was no better dressed. It was she who handed over to me the brass-bound diving rod known as Mahendra Chandai at a most critical moment when the success of a rain-bringing ritual was in grave jeopardy. It was on that occasion they had given me the name of Balaram: for I impersonated the Promethean deity Balaram who taught the first Hindu the art of ploughing...

First mistaken by Balaram for "a nautch-girl in gaudy unsels", Myna grows in his understanding and gradually fills his consciousness. She is a *kirtani*, she has affiliations with the *kamli-wallahs*, she is a seeker—a seeker through song, and dance, and love's consecration. Balaram's path crosses Myna's again and again, and always she comes as a helper, a consoler, an adviser, a redeemer. She has an infallible healing touch that strikes Balaram as little short of the miraculous. She ties a flower to a bird's broken limb, and sets it right anon. She is unsubtle, she is

simple, she is good. On one occasion, Balaram thinks that "Myna's steps hardly touched the earth. There was no sound of foot-falls. She moved as though sustained by invisible wings attached to her feet. Her whole frame glowed like an incandescent bronze figure". It is at the village of Gilani, commanding a view of Nanda Devi, that Myna had "received her first mystic call that led her to become a *kirtani*". Balaram's own memories of the village and of Nanda are vivid and fresh:

To gaze upon Nanda Devi and the other heights on a moonlight night was an experience never to be forgotten: one felt that the ground one stood upon was holy and the sight before one's eyes an unveiling—a foretaste—of the mysteries that led the sages to say: 'I will look up to the mountains'.

He is afraid to revisit the place when Myna is also there, lest she should peremptorily call him: "Come with me as you are!" But later, after her own experience of the Infinite, she does indeed call him: "I want you to be my flautist from now on till I let you go. Maybe, in a year's time. Maybe, after a life-time". And so Balaram decides to shed his other preoccupations and starts on a pilgrimage with Myna.

But before Balaram can thus elect finally to throw in his lot with Myna, he has had to make various experiments in failure, knock about the world a good deal, and see through the masks of divers specimens of humanity. His association with the widely circulated *Life-in-Technikolor* ("issued in twenty different languages and in half-a-dozen scripts") is an interesting diversion. His part-time job with Diwan Nishi Kanta the Cabinet Minister is another. Balaram also comes in contact with the political boss, Ek Nambur, who is almost pure evil, even as Myna is pure goodness. Lest we should miss the point, the epic story of Nahush is recapitulated: Nahush became so much of a tyrant that his tyranny recoiled upon him and he became "transformed into a reptile, a crawling creature at the mercy of whoever cared to cast a stone at him". The Nahush-Nambur phenomenon might be the image of what demagoguery has done to India after independence.

The polarization in the novel is between Myna who is the Flame, who is life, who is love, and Ek Nambur who is all

the marsh vapours, who is falsehood, who is lust; but Balaram has other insights too. The newly educated, the Anglicized and the Americanized, the reformists and the progressives, seem rather foolish and superficial to Balaram in comparison with the 'common people' who gather on the steps of the *ghats* in our rivers or in temple-yards:

...men and women who barely knew the art of reading, but were infinitely better educated in the lore of the country's legends and history: they did not suffer from that feeling of inferiority which characterized Calcutta's 'cultivated people'—the feeling which made them admire with passionate fanaticism the regimes of distant countries like Russia or China or America...for them civilization was equivalent to the general standard of material comfort and of mechanization of industries.

In the course of a discussion some years ago with D. J. Enright and Nissim Ezekiel, Sudhin Ghose remarked that "most of the Indian writers writing in English are in revolt against traditional Hinduism...they believe that they have got a mission that a novel's function should be seeing through society. . . . They are more or less writing a social criticism of Hindu society". Quite obviously, Sudhin Ghose's fiction is an attempt to redress the balance in this respect. In an interview that Malcolm Muggeridge gave on 28 March 1969, he is reported to have said: "India is dear to me by virtue of its sheer refusal to come into the twentieth century. The only thing that has saved you is poverty. You do not have glossy magazines, American TV—I just hate the stuff". It is somewhat in the same spirit that Sudhin Ghose has made Balaram castigate our 'cultivated people' who think it "superstitious or undignified to take any interest in Indian myths and cults".

Although Myna with her purity and grace charges the novel with radiant purpose, making nought almost of the machinations of Ek Nambur and the calculations of the *khadiwallas* and the *topiwallas*, there are other interesting characters too who engagingly flit through the pages. There are references to strange practices like buying a blessing or the *Nishir Dak*. And citations from the Sanskrit classics reinforce the meaning of the narrative at various points. There are caricatures like Professor Foni

(Phoney?) Dhar who makes a fortune with his preposterous verse anthology, *The Anna Nosegay*, and there are oddities like Kusum the hostel cook and the Diwan's second wife. Humour, fantasy, irony, satire, drollery, all mingle to tease and exasperate the reader, but as one feels also involved in the narrative, one reads on and on, lighting upon the unexpected all the way. The novel is not about Calcutta alone, but sends out creepers far distant—Benares, Penhari Parganas, Nanda Devi, Delhi, even Chicago. Politics, intrigue, journalism, scholarship, religion, all are thrown into the ceaseless talk and flow of action, and the head often reels, and there is but a mere hair's breadth dividing the sublime and the absurd. But there is one recurrent note that the reader cannot miss. It is the notion of *matra*. As Myna tells Balaram, "The man who knows his *matra* will easily secure what he wants: he will not be denied the blessings he deserves. He can buy it for a song". *Matra* is a feeling for measure, a sense of proportion. The Diwan continues in politics, jostling with the Ek Namburs and men of that ilk, simply because he hopes thereby "to remind them that there is such a thing as *matra*. It is fatal to overstep 'the line of chalk'—one's limiting boundary". Nahush himself came at last to grief because "he forgot his *matra*". One way or the other—whether in the Kala Bhairav temple or in the Diwan's mansion, in public or in private life—it is always unwise to lose one's sense of *matra*. "Always in a hurry!" Myna chides Balaram towards the end of the novel, "Where's your sense of *matra*?" What shall it profit man, it has been said, if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul! This too results from an ignorance of *matra*. *The Flame of the Forest* is almost a parable for our time, not the less pointed because it is so enjoyably presented. It can hardly be doubted that Sudhin Ghose's novels have contributed something truly significant to Indo-Anglian fiction.

Like Sudhin Ghose's novels, Justice M. Anantanarayanan's *The Silver Pilgrimage* (1961) is also compounded of fantasy and actuality, poetry and prophecy, and is equally—and defiantly—autochthonous. One of the epigraphs mentions three sorts of pilgrimages, the Gold (to Kailasa-Giri), the Silver (to Kashi-Benares), and the Leaden (to the other shrines). *The Silver Pilgrimage* is the account of a journey on foot undertaken

by Prince Jayasurya of Lanka (Ceylon) and his friend, Tilaka. If Prince Siddhartha is oversensitive, and the sight of old age, sickness and death makes a profound melancholy settle upon him, Prince Jayasurya suffers apparently from a total lack of sensitiveness: "he loved none but himself". Even the death of his wife, the Princess Yasodhara, leaves him cold. This sickness of self-love resists treatment by medicine and philosophy alike. Then, suddenly, the Prince becomes infatuated with a gipsy dancer, and proposes to marry her. On being consulted by the King, the sage Agastya suggests that the Prince may be sent away on a pilgrimage on foot to Kashi. This would bring him into contact with the everyday actualities of life—"the perils and fatigues, the inclement weather of the different provinces of India, bad roads, dirty, exorbitant inns, the danger of being stripped by official and unofficial robbers"—and he would learn of the glory and beauty and grandeur and loveliness of existence: and he would learn to see beauty in the terror of existence, in life's renewal, in the seeming mindlessness and delayed retributions of existence. "His illness is not mild", concludes the sage; "It is the dread infection that tyrants suffer from. Unpurged, the toxins will corrupt his heart and drive him to the grossest of delusions... His laughter and hardness will grow, and become as a sword blade". And so the Prince and his friend set out on the pilgrimage, and undergo a variety of adventures and misadventures. After a difficult journey through Kerala, they are seized on their way to Madura by a Marava chieftain and are threatened with death. But thanks to his daughter, Valli, and the brahmin purohit, they manage to escape. These four now trek across the Indian continent, visiting Madura, Tanjavor, Rajahmundry-upon-Godavari, and at last (after a brief term in prison) reach Kashi. All along the way there have been encounters—physical, emotional, intellectual—enabling the Prince to taste more and more of the savour of existence, and the climactic point is the encounter with the venerable Saint at Kashi. To the Prince he says:

So you see, events do not prevent you from being peaceful and joyous. It is flitting thought about them which prevents peace. When the mind is intensely focussed in the present, when it is not separate

from the event but is event itself, there is, spontaneously, both peace and happiness.

When Tilaka raises the question of the 'future' and our normal preoccupations with it, the Saint says:

How can the future be important, when it does not exist apart from the present, which alone exists? Surely, the future is a phantasm in the present, and it is the incompleteness of living which creates these ghosts?

When Tilaka asks "What are we then to do?" the Saint simply answers: "Why do you feel that you must do something in order to be peaceful and happy at all times? All times, all places, are sustained in peace and bliss. *Om shanti, shanti, shanti-hi!*"

On the return journey, the travellers witness the Nagapudi dance of the Andhras and, at Kanchipuram, they get a recipe for making a delectable South Indian dish. Further south, they lose the faithful Valli—"sword-true and blade-straight"—for she dies of cholera. The medium, Rakki, helps the Prince to know something about the conditions of after-life, and he realizes that, "however gilded", it has its "ineradicable snags" as well. It is *this* life—here and now—that is to be the field of thought, action and realization. On his homecoming, the Prince ascends the throne of Lanka (his father having died lately), and it is to be presumed that he proves a sensible and farsighted ruler.

Life as a journey and a struggle; life as an education that is the result of the dialectic, the see-saw of thought and action, of experience and memory; the crown of life as the capacity to distil the quality of each fleeting moment of existence—"Life is dear and supportable at all points, however great the anguish or mean the situation, for everywhere it is in tension"—each moment that is tension as well as the poise and peace that transcend the tension: these are the insights in *The Silver Pilgrimage*. The tale is no doubt set in mediaeval India, but mediaeval and modern jumble and fuse to exhilarating effect. Dasaratha of Ayodhya exiles his son Rama for a period of fourteen years, and Rama, Lakshmana and Sita find their way to Lanka and return together, sadder and wiser for their experiences. So it is with Jayasurya and his friend. Exile is a

primordial theme, and it hasn't lost its contemporaneous relevance. This is the reason why *The Silver Pilgrimage* disconcertingly eludes our notions of time and locality, and captivates us with its hues of universality.

A journey and a struggle, a movement from innocence to experience, a growth in consciousness, education in the large School of Life: it is on this formula that many an epic, many a novel, is spaciouly structured, and G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) belongs to this class. On a first view, it is a Joycean exercise in seeming incoherence and total comprehension, and the narrator-hero Mr. Hatterr, who is half-European half-Malayan, journeys through life cutting across classes, professions and continents, accumulating a variety of impressions, instructions and presumptions, out of which some sort of design or pointer for living may emerge. Unquestionably *All About H. Hatterr* is a tour de force, an astonishing feat of verbal legerdemain. Anticipating the reader's exasperation, Desani explains the 'ABC of the book' in the opening pages. Firstly, the choice of words is conditioned by the writer's experience, and "that's all why, this book isn't English as she is wrote and spoke. No mere verbal contortionism, I assure you". Secondly, although Desani is the creator of Hatterr (even as Shakespeare was the creator of Hamlet), the book is still Hatterr's: "though I warrantee and underwrite, the book's *his*. I remain anonymous". And, thirdly, "the arbitrary choice of words and constructions" in the writing are there simply because "they are *natural* to H. Hatterr". To the Joycean freedom of linguistic experimentation and the endless appetite for experience, there is added a Rabelaisian exuberance, and a quirkiness that is peculiarly Desani's own. The book was probably written during the war years, but it was published only in 1948, and reissued next year. It is called a "gesture"—and indeed it is a gesture of melodramatic defiance and of disconcerting self-expression.

Introducing a new edition of *All About H. Hatterr* (1970), Anthony Burgess describes the language of the book "a sort of creative chaos that grumbles at the restraining banks . . . it is, like the English of Shakespeare, Joyce and Kipling, gloriously impure". Not a page but is other than stale or humdrum, and one may suddenly chance upon a bit as recklessly veracious as—

A man's choice (of words) . . . is conditioned by his experience. . . . To one, M.P. stands for a Member of Parliament. To another, it might mean, major parasite. Depends on his experience.

No wonder Lord Butler is reported to have testified: "Mr. Desani has certainly served to enliven for me the tedium of long sittings in the House of Commons".

Like Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, Hatterr and his friend Banerrji move through the spaces of the novel, and their paths often intersect meaningfully. "I was thinking", writes Hatterr towards the end, "what would I do without Banerrji! The feller had been more a brother than a pal to me . . . more to me than my own flesh and blood David-Jonathan". And earlier, Banerrji is contrasted with the others Hatterr has known: "Will you compare the measure of goodness in Banerrji, his *faith*, his unqualified *love*, and his *selflessness*, with the *avarice* and *selfish purpose* of the other fellers I have told about?" Hatterr's adventures fill the Indian continent, and there is an overflow as well. He meets the Sages of Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Mogalsarai and All-India, receives 'instruction', and formulates 'presumptions'. Be suspicious! Meditate—if only on a male dog! Look for the indirect lesson! Reality is not Appearance! Abscond from charlatans! On his own, Hatterr enunciates the various 'presumptions', for example, "Youth is an ugly age", "Evil triumphs", "Kismet or fate is a dam baffling thing", and so on. Escaping from the pursuit of the washerwoman, Hatterr starts pursuing Rosie of the circus show, and then he has a series of encounters with bogus saints of all kinds: Sadanandji, Ananda Giri-Giri, Master Punchum! Kismet in the meantime entangles Hatterr in the coils of matrimony, which proves to be a shattering experience. As a result of all these miscellaneous knocks against random circumstance, Hatterr evolves his Philosophy of Contrast on a par with the Relativity Theory. As he explains to Banerrji in a mood of effusiveness:

Damme, I don't expect any mercy from undertakers! I am working for posterity! . . . And I say to posterity, in Twentieth Century, '*Life is contrast*'. That is my *crux*-Statement . . . *Life* is ups and downs, light and shade, sun and cloud, opposites and opposites! . . . Take anything,

and you will find the opposite! Banerji, imagination boggles at the contrasts I have indexed for reference purposes...If I cannot leave anything to posterity, I should like to leave them this self-realised medico-philosophical conclusion as to *Life*. *Life is contrast!*

Again, at the end of the book:

Life is no one way pattern. It's contrasts all the way. And contrasts by Law!

Not just motley mosaic, not just crazy run-and-go-do-as-you-please contrasts, but design in 'em...

If this is madness, there is surely some method in it.

The book has doubtless some sense of pattern, and is alive with the electrical charges of meaning, but it is the wild gusto of the writing that lights up every page almost. The oddest odds and ends of scholarship, the dizziest flights of fancy or poetry and the craftiest juggleries in idiom and phrasing often mingle to throw the reader's equanimity out of gear:

Concubinage and legitimate sex is absolutely forbidden to spiritual gentlemen. In fact, such men are no longer human, but, they are higher. I say, they are the nearest approximation to the Greek *psyche*, the Hindu *atma*, the Christian *soul*, the Muslim *rooh*, and there is a Hebrew conception as well. I humbly agree with St. Matt. xix, ii, 12. There be eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Sex is very impure, please. Hence the *last sadhana*.

This is Banerji speaking, who has evidently caught the contagion from his friend. And Banerji can also let himself go, if not in the Ercles' vein, at least in the Shakespearian:

Iago (addressing Hatterr), I am as meek as Moses, but I have just heard that you have been mishandled by that Bhata Govinda. Whip me, ye devils! Roast me in sulphur! Gall, worse than gall! A rascally yea-forsooth knave! Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas! Falstaff speaking, I am as subject to heat as butter. A man of continuous dissolution and thaw! What valour were it, when a cur doth grin! If I can but catch him once upon the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him!

As for Hatterr, he is master of many moods, and a flautist of many notes. He can give in a nut-shell "the bush theologia-

indica"; he can differentiate between the Hitters and the ruddy crabs (and between two kinds of ruddy crabs too); and he can rhapsodise about the Ganga:

Everything is in a universal embrace, truly, a slumber of love!
Blessed be the stars, and the little crescent moon, caressed by her waves, the deathless spirit of the beautiful Ganga, too, sleeps.

Just a few ripples are there, now lustrous in startlight, but soon lost, the silver for ever gone, gone, gone into the womb of the night.

The holy Ganga....

The music made by Ganga, the roar wrought by Ganga, the peace blessed by Ganga, is like nothing else in the world!

That night, I knew the holy river.

That night, I adored Her.

Adored the Mother of man, the Angel she...

She the high-wrought, She the fascination, the comely, flower-decked, dew-laden Fair; dainty, elegant, gay, oh, a lovely superb! The maid She, the child She, the Babe She...

It is a mystic experience, at least something very near to it; and Hatterr is won, he is awed, he is overwhelmed:

In *sarad*, *hemant*, *sisir*, in all season alike, sheltered under a canopy fan-shaped, of the lily and the lotus, frozen flowers, frozen in a proud garden of the lily and the lotus-laden snow, She dwelleth, dwelleth the Babe!...

And I prayed...

On that Indian night, face to face with the grandeur of the holy river, a loving dread overpowered me: the dread of Lord God.

I listened to the silence...

Then, suddenly, I heard a piercing scream...

This, all this, this contradiction, this merging of beauty with brutality, this non-separation between Evil and Good, this unity, this one-ness, this evidence made me feel, perhaps, there is no Good: there is no Evil!

Perhaps both are just phases...

This is beyonding, in a flash, the categories of contrasts; and Hatterr feels "lost, ego-less identity-less, like one dead; yet, at peace, at great peace, with all creation, all men, and my Maker-Destroyer Lord". And it is this same mystic who gets into such a variety of scrapes, as detailed elsewhere in the novel. And if the reader should demur, Hatterr has his answer ready: "Impro-

bable, you say? No fellers. All improbables are probable in India".

These are days when we hear repeatedly of 'heart transplants', and Dr. Christian Bernard has become one of the mythic heroes of our time; and we hear even of plastic hearts equipped with computerized electric motors for pumping the blood. But in 1945, Purushottamdas Tricamdas the brilliant Bombay lawyer and Socialist politician published a novel, *The Living Mask*, on this theme of transplant. The head of one person is grafted on the body of another, and there are the inevitable psychological complications. It is a breathlessly exciting novel, and recaptures something of the tantalizing quality of the old Indian story of the "transposed heads", which has also been effectively retold by Thomas Mann. Dilip Kumar Roy's *The Upward Spiral* (1949), on the other hand, is not a fantasy but an excursion into the world of spiritual intensities. While the human interest is not sacrificed, the accent on the dynamics of Yoga and the claims of the higher life gives its distinctive quality to the novel. The discussions are often protracted, the characters veer between extreme moods, the scene shifts from the plains to the heights and back to the plains again, but the personality of the Guru—obviously modelled on Dilip's own Guru, Sri Aurobindo—gives a synoptic unity to the novel. Dilip's more recent novel, *Miracles Do Still Happen*, an English translation of his own Bengali *Agaton Ajo Ghate*, is cast in the form of a 'Bhakta Vijayam', a series of 'miraculous' happenings wrought by Grace. Most of the narrative is Asit (who is Dilip himself) talking to Barbara, an American girl who feels the lure of the Spirit. As we read on and on, we feel we are ourselves involved in Barbara's inner drama of amazement, perplexity, doubt, incredulity, faith; we try to keep track of the linked dialogue between East and West, Intuition and Intellect, Faith and Doubt; we believe and we don't believe, we surrender and we resist, till we realize at last that the 'novel' has only one character, Grace. The assumption behind Dilip's book is simply that God is no stranger to the mire-sunk ways of the world; He mingles in our affairs unexpectedly, though of course unseen by us; His Grace never slumbers. A 'miracle' is no human or superhuman feat; it is an act of God. It is Grace taking a hand in the phenomenal

play, sometimes in response to the cry of the human soul, sometimes independently. Dilip's book is far more of a manual of bhakti than a piece of fiction, and it reads like a commentary on St. Paul's dictum that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.

One of the makers of modern Gujarati literature, K. M. Munshi has written a good deal in English as well, and his novel *Bhagwan Parashurama*, set in ancient India, deserves more than a passing mention here. In the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, Parashurama is as it were suddenly shown and as suddenly withdrawn; the end of his avatarhood comes at the moment he is reduced to discomfiture by Rama. But how about the long years of Parashurama's boyhood, youth and early manhood? Munshi begins his epic narrative almost at the 'dawn of creation', with Bhrigu Maharshi bringing down fire from heaven and teaching the law of the *Rita*. Rishi Jamadagni is of the race of the Bhrigus, and his son is Parashurama. Jamadagni and his maternal uncle, Vishvaratha (Prince of the Bharatas) are fellow-pupils of Rishi Agastya. Vishvaratha and Agastya clash when the former decides to marry the Dasyu princess, Ugra. The racial issue between the Aryans and the Dasyus assumes the form of racial purism versus national integration; and the issue is joined, first between Agastya and Vishvaratha (Vishvamitra), and later between Agastya's younger brother, Vasishta, and Vishvamitra again. It is the spontaneous prayer of Vishvamitra when he desires to raise Ugra to Aryanhood that takes the form of the celebrated *gayatri*. But there are extremist high-priests on both sides,—Agastya and Bairava,—and Ugra is the victim. Agastya's eyes are opened at last by Lopamudra, whom he marries, and he is persuaded to retire from the fray. For the next decade or two, Vishvamitra and the 'integrationists' have it all their own way. Yet the purist diehards only bide their time, and Sahasrarjuna of Anupadesa emerges as a new power fiercely poised against Aryavarta. The mighty opposites, Parashurama and Sahasrarjuna, seize the centre of the stage, and many are the vicissitudes of the struggle. Aryavarta itself is soon in flames, and while Vasishta wins a pyrrhic victory, dying Vishvamitra wins the truer crown. He dies happy because he has established that "Aryanhood does not depend on colour or birth but in man

himself. If man is able to reach God, he is an Arya". The way is cleared for the blending of the two races, and for a time the people of Aryavarta live united and prosperous. But the peace is soon disrupted when Sahasrarjuna invades Aryavarta, whose kings fall like ninepins before his onslaught. The Ashrams of Parasara, Vasishta and Jamadagni are all overrun. But Parashurama rallies the forces of Aryavarta and, although he is too late to save his father, he comes in time to destroy Sahasrarjuna. Many of the characters in this enormous novel are implicated in our racial memories, and reading it is like revisiting the scenes of our childhood—even the childhood of the race. But, after all, have things changed so radically today, notwithstanding the passage of three or four thousand years? We still talk of the need for the 'emotional integration' of the peoples of India that is Bharat. Munshi has thus given a contemporaneous urgency to his novel apparently set in remote times.

Munshi's long novel, *Tapasvini: or, The Lure of Power* (1964), is an English version of his own Gujarati, and covers the period from World War I to the coming of provincial autonomy in 1937. The background, then, is the Gandhian Age. But the political issue between the alien bureaucracy and the nationalist movement (and, within the latter, between the Gandhian forces and the terrorist elements) is not the whole of the novel. The people who are involved in politics (whatever their public image) are also human beings, and a novelist should be interested in his characters more as men and women than as bureaucrats, or as congressmen or communists. The necessary fusion of the human idiom and the political idiom can be achieved only through a symbol; and the symbol in Munshi's novel is 'Tapasvini'—which is also the title of a novel by Munshi's hero, Uday Solanki. The course of love between Uday (who is separated from his wife, Alice) and Sheela (who is married to the egotistical and lecherous Radharaman) is part of the theme of the novel. It doesn't run smooth and only towards the end, after several years of uncertainty and misery, destiny at last brings them together. An even more important strand in the theme is the Ravi-Raj story. Various influences shape Ravi: his grandfather's example and exhortations, his father's memory, Sheela's kindness, Mona's unconventional comrade-

ship, Uday's steady friendship; but the mainspring of his thoughts and actions is the lust for power. He would make use of people as stepping-stones to the beckoning summits of power and fame! This mad craving coarsens his sensibility and blinds his vision. He becomes more and more the slave, rather than the master, of events. The great inner change in his life is wrought by Uday's sister, the mystic Raj—who is the real *tapasvini* of the novel. She is a woman come from heaven "bringing the peace which knows no end"; she grows further dimensions at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry; she is capable of infinite understanding and compassion. It is this girl—half angel, half bird, and subject to fits and indifferent to politics—who awakens in Ravi the soul he has suppressed so long, and so he gains the strength to fight his own egotism and learns to see things with new eyes. *Tapasvini* is a novel that vividly combines the personal and political perspectives, and reveals the currents of the worlds without and within.

The drama of the Indian struggle for independence has been the theme of quite a few novels. Venu Chitale's *In Transit* (1950) and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's *Inqilab* (1955) are both heavily loaded with ore, but the art that transforms the raw material into the finished product is not fully in evidence. The action of Chitale's novel spreads over the whole arc of the Gandhian revolution, while Abbas's confines itself to the twenties and the early thirties, the climactic event being the Gandhi-Irwin pact. Chitale takes us to the heart of a Maharashtrian family caught in the revolutionary whirlwind; Abbas takes us to Delhi, Aligarh and the North, and concentrates mainly on the destinies of a group of Muslims. A twist is added in the end when the Muslim hero, Anwar, discovers that he is really a Hindu merchant's son by the prostitute Chhamia, but brought up affectionately by a Muslim, Akbar Ali: "He (Anwar) was a strange symbol of unity, a human *sangam* in which such diverse streams of blood and cultures had met!" Both Chitale and Abbas write interestingly of men and movements, but it is a far, far cry to a classic like *War and Peace* or the more recent epic of revolution and reconstruction, *Doctor Zhivago*. The Gandhi and Nehru eras of modern Indian history remain a challenge to our still mute or muted Tolstoyes and Pasternaks who are today obscurely

struggling for artistic self-expression in the field of the novel. We have so far had only the first random samplings, creditable as far they go, but the real harvest is yet to come.

The Goan struggle for independence is a miniature version—quantitatively, not qualitatively, for suffering is the same whether ten or ten million suffer—of India's journey and struggle from 1857 the year of the mutiny to 1947. Lambert Mascarenhas's *Sorrowing Lies My Land* (1955) is an excruciating picture of Goa in the years before the liberation in December 1961. Concentrated in a small but enchanting coastal region in Western India, the Goans were agonizingly conscious of their cruel plight under Portuguese rule, while their poverty made it necessary for large numbers to seek a livelihood in Africa and India, especially Bombay. There was, then, the fact of Goan Catholicism. Although the Catholic families in Goa were most of them descended from Hindu families, the imperatives of Portuguese imperialism systematically sought to make Goan Catholics un-Indian—in their dress, names, speech and in all the nuances of their social life. All these aspects—political, economic, religious, social—of Goan life are vividly brought out in Mascarenhas's novel. One of the terribly poignant things in the book is the rape of Milena by the troops; another is the incident of a son testifying against his own father to the authorities—the sort of thing, one would have thought, could happen only under a Hitler! The lesson of the novel is that a corrupt and soulless political or administrative system can poison the wells of public and private life alike. Total tyranny brings about the total suppression or perversion of all the ancient sanctities, and humanity is thereby turned into a hideous caricature of itself. Tobias, the central figure in Mascarenhas's novel, is elaborately and convincingly drawn. "The soil was in his blood. It held for him an eternal mystery, as close as a woman's womb". His Catholicism is truly catholic, and his learning does not divorce him from his people. One by one he is deprived of his supports: one of his sons enters the Church, another migrates to Africa, his wife dies, his friends look askance at him. Yet is he most heroic just when he is pushed to the extreme edge of helplessness and solitariness. So too, by implication, Goa had her bravest, finest hour, when her body was bruised by oppression, but her spirit

stood defiant, facing the future with courage and faith.

A lawyer by training, Khushwant Singh's most enduring work has been done in the field of Sikh history and biography, and his full-length portrait of Ranjit Singh vividly brings out the leader, the ruler and the man. He has also published two novels, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959), two collections of short stories, *The Mark of Vishnu* (1950) and *A Bride for the Sahib* (1967), and he has translated Rajinder Singh Bedi's Urdu novel *Ek Chadar Maili Si* into English as *I Take This Woman* (1966). *Train to Pakistan* projects with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during the terror-haunted days of August 1947. The 'leaders' had sowed the wind of communal suspicion, and Partition was the result; like a whirlwind, the mad act of Partition was uprooting masses of humanity, mangling them, and throwing them across the border in heap after heap. "The riots had become a rout", writes Khushwant Singh; "By the summer of 1947...ten million people—Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs—were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror or in hiding". The only exceptions were isolated villages, one of them being Mano Majra, a border village on the banks of the Sutlej, with a railway bridge spanning the river. Of Mano Majra the novelist writes:

Mano Majra is a tiny place. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the moneylender Lala Ram Lal. The other two are the Sikh temple and the mosque....There are only about seventy families in Mano Majra, and Lala Ram Lal's is the only Hindu family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number... there is one object that all Mano Majrans—even Lala Ram Lal—venerate. This is a three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keekar tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the *deo* to which all the villagers—Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo-Christian—repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing.

Here's functional 'integration', and indeed there are tens of thousands of villages like Mano Majra where the law has always been peaceful coexistence, and not communal strife. But 1947 was not like other times. Suspicion and violence filled the air,

and an ill wind carried them even to little oases of communal harmony like Mano Majra.

Characteristically enough, the novel begins with house-breaking and robbery and the murder of the moneylender, Lala Ram Lal. Five dacoits are engaged in this exploit, and when they go away with the booty, they throw bangles over the wall into Juggut Singh's house—as a taunt for his not having joined the party that night. Juggut or Jugga, however, is not in his house; he is with his girl, Nooran, in the fields, making love to her. Dacoity and murder, romance and love-making: what else? At about the same time, Hukum Chand, deputy commissioner of the district, who is camping in Mano Majra, is busy getting drunk and pawing the hired prostitute, Haseena. Murder, romance on the sly, sordid intrigue—all this 'on the eve', as it were, as prelude to the swelling act! A trainload of corpses from Pakistan crosses the railway bridge near Mano Majra, refugees pour in, and, incidentally, a Communist named Iqbal Singh also arrives. Some of the refugees raise the cry for reprisals. There is a meeting of the Sikhs, and a few Muslims join them. The latter want to know whether, like the Muslims in other villages, they too—the Muslims of Mano Majra—should leave for a place of safety:

What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.

The Sikh lambardar (headman) answers:

Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like. If anyone speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads is touched. But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do?

To be on the safe side, the Muslims decide to go. But presently the situation deteriorates still further. A few Sikhs come late at night in khaki uniforms in a jeep, and the Mano Majra Sikhs are thrown into confusion. The leader of the khaki-clad is but "a

boy in his teens with a little beard which was glued to his chin with brilliantine". Surveying the scene, the boy asks:

Do you know how many trainloads of dead Sikhs and Hindus have come over? Do you know of the massacres in Rawalpindi and Multan, Gujranwala and Sheikhpora? What are you doing about it? You just eat and sleep and you call yourselves Sikhs—the brave Sikhs! The martial class!

Naively the lambardar answers: "What can we do, Sardarji? If our Government goes to war with Pakistan, we will fight". This provokes a diatribe from the boy-leader:

Government! You expect the government to do anything? A government consisting of cowardly banian moneylenders!

The lambardar hesitantly says: "Do tell us what we can do". And promptly the answer comes: "For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two... For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across..." It is the savage law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. There is awed silence till Meet Singh the priest says haltingly:

I was going to say, what have the Muslims here done to us for us to kill them in revenge for what Muslims in Pakistan are doing?

It is the still small voice of sanity, the voice of reason, the voice of humanity. Once again he musters strength to say: "What bravery is there in killing unarmed innocent people?" But the words of the boy strike fire in some of the others, and they are ready to be guided by him. The boy tells them that a trainload of Muslims is to cross the bridge the next day, and the Mano Majran Sikhs should see to it that the train carries only dead Muslims. Even the reminder that the train will carry Mano Majran Muslims also doesn't alter the decision. The plan is to stretch a rope across the first span of the bridge, a foot above the funnel of the engine; "when the train passes under it, it will sweep off all the people sitting on the roof of the train. That will account for at least four to five hundred". Already,

the local Muslims have been evacuated to a camp; and while the train takes them to Pakistan, they are to be set upon and destroyed. But even in this universal madness, humanity—or the simple uncalculating love of a man for a woman—asserts itself and saves the situation. The rough Jugga—a self-confessed bud-mash—realizes that the attack on the train must mean danger to his Nooran, and makes up his mind to prevent the attack, if necessary at the risk of his own life. Even the abandoned old rake, Hukum Chand, is not devoid of feeling for the girl Haseena. Crushed by the march of events, Hukum Chand gives vent to his spleen and rails against the men in Delhi:

What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly! Loud-speakers magnifying their egos; lovely-looking foreign women in the visitors' galleries in breathless admiration. 'He is a great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours... Wasn't that a wonderful thing to say? "Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially".' Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, you made your tryst. So did many others—on the 15th August, Independence Day.

At night, according to plan, the 'avengers' tie the rope "stiff as a shaft of steel", and await the coming of the train in tense anticipation. But Jugga manages to get at the rope and slash it away:

He went at it with his knife, and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan.

A nightmare with an exciting finish, one closes the novel with a sense of relief; the lie has become the truth, the unbelievable has happened! What is recorded with such particularity was but a speck in the dust-whirl that was the Partition. And there is enough evidence to convict both the British administrators who, after a hundred years of trusteeship, could only prepare for this holocaust, and the national movement led by barristers, thinkers, poets, statesmen, *mahatmas* and *maulanas* that could celebrate the baptism of freedom only with mass murder and revolting bestiality. As a piece of fiction, *Train to Pakistan* is cleverly

contrived, and the interior stitching and general colouring is beyond cavil. We begin with Jugga and Hukum, a budmash and a rake; and it is thanks to them—for Hukum sets Jugga free and Jugga snaps the rope—that the refugee train crosses over safely to Pakistan. It could not have been an easy, novel to write. The events, so recent, so terrible in their utter savagery and meaninglessness, must have defied assimilation in terms of art. Khushwant Singh, however, has succeeded through resolved limitation and rigorous selection in communicating to his readers a hint of the grossness, ghastliness and total insanity of the two-nation theory and the Partition tragedy. The pity and the horror of it all!—and the novel adequately conveys them both.

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale is located in the ambiguous and disturbed pre-partition period, and concentrates on the inner tensions and external movements of a well-to-do Sikh family in the Punjab from April 1942 to April 1943. It was the period of the 'Quit India' conflagration, and naturally the relations between the bureaucracy and the people were more than strained. While Buta Singh the Senior Magistrate is anxious to be on the right side of the Government, his son Sher is involved in the activities of a terrorist group of students including Madan who is a brilliant cricketer doubled with a rake. Sher's young wife, Champak, is little more than a bitch, and the novel describes at some length her exercises in sensuality. Khushwant Singh observes as with a microscope, and records his findings without any squeamishness; and his analysis of the complex of relationships within the family and in the wider world, and his unravelling of the tangle of conflicting loyalties, show both understanding and skill. Humour is blended with brutality, mere sentiment is eschewed, and the picture that emerges is arresting as well as amusing. The triumph of the book is really the portrait of Sabhrai, Buta Singh's wife. Her faith in the Guru and in the Adi Granth is unshakable. When Sher is arrested and all others feel dazed or mad, Sabhrai says quietly: "We shall have a non-stop reading of the Granth for two days and nights. The Guru will be our guide". When the consensus in the family is that Sher should secure his release even going to the extent of betraying his comrades, Sabhrai keeps her own counsel. She spends a whole night in the Gurudwara, seeking light, seeking a clue:

Why did the Guru not guide her in her hour of need? Had she lost faith? She recalled the time when she had come to this very temple to take part in the cleaning of the sacred pool... People said that the hawk of the last Guru would come to see the cleaning. Non-believers had laughed their vulgar laughter... But the hawk had come. With her own eyes she had seen it swoop down from the heavens... Was her faith shaking? She tried to dismiss all other thoughts and bring the picture of the last warrior Guru to her mind... There was a man. He had lost all his four sons and refused to give in to injustice. She was to lose only one. How had the Guru faced the loss of his children?

When, in the morning, she meets Sher in his prison cell, and he asks her what he should do, she doesn't falter, her faith is like a rock of adamant:

She dried her tears and blew her nose. 'Son, I spent last night at the Golden Temple asking the Guru for guidance. I do not know whether I got it right. In any case His orders were for me; not for you'.

'What did He say, Mother? Why don't you tell me?'

'He said that my son had done wrong. But if he named the people who were with him he would be doing a greater wrong. He was no longer to be regarded as a Sikh and I was not to see his face again... May the Guru be with you in body and in spirit'.

Illiterate, superstitious and old-fashioned—this is how she strikes others, and this is how she would have disarmingly described herself—Sabhrai is yet sustained by the old-world tenacity and purity of her faith, and this evokes the respect and admiration of everybody. Joyce Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner's wife, feels specially drawn towards Sabhrai. But the night at the Gurudwara and the excitement of the interview in the jail prove too much for Sabhrai, she has fever and pneumonia, and although Sher is released in the meantime, she doesn't recover. One thing worries her: Had Sher "ignored her advice and confessed? She did not feel strong enough to question him." She calls the family to the bedside, joins the chant of the morning prayer, and presently her lips stop moving and her face is radiant with an unearthly glow. After this, anything must be an anti-climax, and the widower Buta Singh, now a Companion of the Indian Empire, can be expected to play his appropriate role. He has

a successful interview with Joyce Taylor, and takes leave of her with the words: "Thank you, madam. As a famous English poet has said, 'All's well that ends well'". Although not as tightly constructed as *Train to Pakistan* and although lacking its consistency of tone and power of articulation, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* has a vivid sense of time, place and the social milieu; and the figure of Sabhrai wholly redeems the dimness and murkiness of the general atmosphere. The fever of sensuality is easier to describe than the radiance of Faith, and this is the reason why Sabhrai almost 'steals' the novel.

Anand Lall (better known as Arthur Lall, sometime India's permanent representative at the United Nations) has published two novels, *The House at Adampur* (1956) and *Seasons of Jupiter* (1958). Lall can write English with facility, and this is doubtless an asset. *The House at Adampur* takes its title from a pleasure-house at Adampur, where Raja Muzaffar Khan maintains his harem. His friend, Dewan Ram Nath, is a furtive occasional visitor and shares half-mindedly the salacious thrills it offers. When the Raja dies, the Dewan buys the house and runs his own show; and when he dies in his turn, he leaves it to Jai Singh, who is presumably expected to continue the same "kind of immersion in the unbroken past of India"! Jai is a lawyer and a politician, and while he is wavering between Lena and Geeta, the latter more or less seduces him. The Dewan himself is secretly enamoured of Geeta, his niece, though he tries to cover it up with a mixture of make-believe and silliness. Upper class, aristocracy—are they but this, silliness plus sensuality? Sex and pseudo-politics figure a good deal in the novel, but the plotting is poor, the characters are on the whole unpleasant and unconvincing, and the dialogues seldom sound quite natural. People are patriots and philanderers at once, and agreeably cultivate jail-going and woman-hunting as complementary occupations. What a set! There is no poetry, no faith, no integrity, no hope, in most of these characters. They wander between contradictory worlds—they are seized with bewilderment—they half-headedly seek a harmony that can never be theirs. Was the Gandhian Age no more than this? The truth of the matter, perhaps, is that Anand Lall, for all his intelligence, is afflicted with a bureaucratic narrowness of vision, only

too apt to see the world as incoming and outgoing heaps of files and hence his picture of India is little more than a caricature.

In his second novel, *Seasons of Jupiter*, Anand Lall attempts a full-length portrait of Rai Gyan Chand, the scion of a rich family in Amritsar. It is as though Gyan Chand, now sixty, is telling his own story, but there is another narrator at the beginning and end, who has an enveloping function in the novel. At the age of seven, Gyan surprises everybody by his courage in dealing with the elephant, Moti, just when it is about to run amok. Gyan spends several years in England qualifying for the Bar, and by the time he returns, his only brother is dead, and his father is dying—and presently dead. Alone and affluent, Gyan has to look out for a design for living. At a week-end hunting party, he makes friends with an English girl, Jennifer, and when she visits Amritsar, he takes her to his palatial house and they become lovers. But marriage is another matter, and he finds in Basanti a suitable wife who bears his children. Lest he should fail to prove a good husband, Gyan does research in his father's library, reading books on erotics and making notes. Basanti, however, dies during her third confinement, and now for a time Gyan is left to his own resources. Narinjan Das, the manager of Gyan's timber yards, often keeps him company and talks of the 'seasons of Jupiter', being a believer in astrology. There are other friends too, and of course there are Gyan's two grown-up sons—one of them married and living in a house of his own, and the other studying in England. Gyan finds himself vaguely entangled in various ambiguous relationships with Narinjan's daughter, Pushpa, with Ranjit, and with 'Askari the Maid of Amritsar'. He lacks the courage to ask Pushpa to be his wife, and so she marries Ranjit instead. With him out of the way, Gyan and Askari become lovers, but this too comes to an end when she resolves to make a new start in her life. Gyan is now "like a tree stricken with lightning—reaching up starkly, a great twisted dry bone". Finding himself at a loose end, Gyan seeks out a Sadhu in the depths of the forest and becomes Narayana, a *san̄nyasi*. For almost seven years he lives this life, reading the Gita, the Upanishads, and the *Ramayana*, meditating, undergoing austerities, forming attachments and ex-

periencing the pangs of parting, and at last, having reached another loose end, casts off his saffron robes and returns to Amritsar. His old friend, Narinjan, dies soon afterwards, and his youngest daughter, Sulochna, marries Gyan and they live in Delhi. It is a 'happy' marriage, evidently, and yet something goes wrong after the birth of a child; the 'common rhythm' is broken, he becomes moody, he exposes himself, he dies. *Seasons of Jupiter* is a strange assortment of a tale, the 'elements' hardly fusing into a whole. Gyan's journey through life is in the 'picaresque' tradition, and while there are interesting situations, the man himself is hardly convincing. Like the 'House at Adampur', the secret room in Gyan's house has a role to play in the novel. Tailored to suit the tastes of Western readers, *Seasons of Jupiter* is equipped with the necessary frills and touched up with the usual colours. Bhattacharya, Narayan, Markandaya, Anand, Raja Rao, Desani have all introduced saints and swamis and sadhus in their novels; why, then, complain if Anand Lall's Gyan Chand too experiments in *sannyasa* to escape for a while from his prison of sensuality and sophistication?

Having already won recognition as a critic of Milton, Balachandra Rajan published his first novel, *The Dark Dancer*, in 1959. The second, *Too Long in the West*, followed two years later. Krishnan the hero of *The Dark Dancer* has spent about ten years in England, and the novel is about his problems of adjustment on his return to India. It is a hackneyed theme, no doubt, but every time an 'exile' returns, for *him* the problem is urgent as well as unique. In *No Longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe describes a similar situation; but Rajan's Krishnan is a far more sophisticated creature (so much the worse for him!) than Achebe's Obi Okonkwo, and the country Krishnan returns to is the India of 1947 caught in the Partition fever, unlike the comparatively peaceful Nigeria to which Obi returns. 'An arranged' marriage to Kamala, a college lecturership and some half-headed involvement in a political demonstration,—and, by force of gravity as it were, Krishnan moves to a comfortable berth at the Delhi Secretariat. His friend Vijayaraghavan the mathematical prodigy is already there, and a telephonic conversation follows:

'Ah, my comrade with the cracked ribs. What brings you, my friend,

into these imperial catacombs?"

'Money, of course'. At least it was a positive reason...

'Money indeed! You can make ten times more money in Chandni Chowk selling antiques to gullible Americans'.

'I didn't mean money literally...I meant it symbolically, as a failure of conscience'.

Left to himself, Krishnan may have pulled through somehow and proved both a good 'householder' and an efficient civil servant. But the atmosphere of the Partition is oppressive, and the coming of Cynthia, his Cambridge friend, gives a sudden twist to the cord of his existence. He is married to Kamala, and is attracted to Cynthia; "that's the way things are", Cynthia tells him, "and until you accept it you'll just be going round in circles". Kamala's withdrawal from the scene to attend upon her ailing mother is another fateful twist, and Krishnan and Cynthia become lovers. Vijayaraghavan tries to warn Krishnan, but to no purpose. When Kamala returns, Krishnan tells her what has happened:

'I can't go on staying with you, Kamala'.

'I don't expect you to'.

There was nothing in her voice, no bitterness, no resentment, not even curiosity about the manner of her defeat...He realized with horror that she wasn't going to resist him. He had made the decision by himself, so he and exclusively he would be responsible, and she wouldn't have the responsibility diluted by explanations, justifications and the minor withdrawals which were the resting-places of conscience.

She tells him she will look after herself, she will not go back to her parents, nor accept a monthly allowance from her husband; in fact, she soon disappears. Recriminations come from others, accusing him of "maltreatment of tradition, disrespect for his caste, indifference to the ignominy suffered by his family, an uncontrolled and immature surrender to emotion"; but he feels he can weather the storm. And while there is this storm within, the storm without bursts in all its fury:

The (Radcliffe) Award was the match that lit the long train of dynamite, snaking and ravaging across the chosen frontier. The violence broke out of honourable men, a lust in their eyes, a smear

of satisfaction on the thirsting knives, the burning homes its beacon and memorial. The words, the inflamed reports, the provocative rumours, were like bacteria in the air that one breathed, and before reason could summon its reserves against the menace, the contagion had seized you and you were its screaming puppet. And after the flaming sky and the broken bodies, after the wailing and the useless appeals...the exodus came, column after column, blindly marching upon the vacant future...They had nothing to look for, only something to flee from.

When Krishnan in a moment of heat tells Cynthia that it was the British who had stirred up all the trouble for a whole generation, she says simply: "In all our three hundred years of occupation, we haven't done what you've done in three weeks of your freedom". Presently, on his birthday, he takes Cynthia to the Muttra Temple, but not being man and wife they couldn't offer gifts to the deity:

His hands fell stiffly to his sides, holding the useless bundles. He turned and went back down the unending steps, each step an addition to the distance of exile.

This has almost a traumatic effect upon Krishnan, and they know they cannot go on as before. "I don't love you", he tells her, and provokes "the forest fire in her eyes"; excuses become self-accusations, explanations turn out to be recriminations; she dismisses him with the words, "I hate you and I never want to see you again".

What next? Coming to know that Kamala is a nurse at Shantihpur, Krishnan decides to go to her. In the train he sees something of the current frenzy at close quarters, and when he tries to remonstrate, he is told:

It's easy enough for you. You people sit in air-conditioned offices, decide our fate, agree to our death-warrants. It's noble to preach sermons. But it's we who pay for all those fancy principles. What would you feel like if it started to happen to you? What would you do if you came home one night and found the house stripped clean of everything you possessed, and your wife dead on the floor with only the blood for her clothing?...Would you sit on the floor and preach your sermons to her?

At Shantihpur, Kamala accepts his return as a fact not meriting

discussion, and they slip into a chastened new relationship. But this felicity is too good to last. Shantihpur, or even its hospital, cannot long be immune from the general epidemic. Day by day the tension mounts, and the terror stalks abroad more and more menacingly. Kamala herself is taut—is silent—is expectant. One evening, she insists on going for a walk with Krishnan, forsaking the security of the hospital. Seeing two roughs pursuing in a narrow lane a Muslim girl, Kamala tries to bar the way, and it occurs to Krishnan "that this was what Kamala had come out for, this was the rendezvous to which she had led him with that erect, queer, now frightening determination". In the scuffle that follows, Krishnan is cast down and Kamala is knifed to death:

...through the haze he saw Kamala not simply standing fast but thrusting erectly, passionately forward, seeming almost to float against the knife. He was shocked by her beauty, her inwardness suddenly stripped bare, the unwavering and almost eerie arrogance, as if for the first time she was meeting her true lover...

The rest is "aftercourses". Krishnan recovers, learns that rough justice had been meted out to the killers, resists his parents' pressures asking him to marry again, stomachs Vijayaraghavan's taunts, and tries to peer into the future across the ashes of the present.

There are two clear strands in the story: the tragedy of Krishnan's marriage and the tragedy of the Partition. It is not easy to make the personal and the national perspectives merge—as in *Doctor Zhivago*, for example—and in Rajan's novel the two strands often stand apart. Nor does the symbolism of the 'Dark Dancer' come out with clarity and force. The Dance of Death is also the Dance of Life, for resurrection is the other side of destruction; and Kamala's ending hints at the joining of the two ends of the meaning. Krishnan himself is but a prig and a pig, Cynthia has some force of individuality, and as for the rest (including the loud Vijayaraghavan), they hardly count. But Kamala grows in the course of a few months from a shy girl to a heroine and a martyr. *The Dark Dancer* is an ambitious effort, and even if one must admit that the writing is flawed in some places by verbal excess, the novel certainly merits praise

on account of Kamala who incarnates Shakti in her essential strength and unfailing gift of compassion and understanding.

Rajan's *Too Long in the West* is a much shorter novel, and is meant to be lighter and gayer than its predecessor. The heroine, Nalini, says towards the end: "Mudalur isn't a place where things get too serious. What happens here deserves a sensible ending". It is as though, having essayed personal and national disaster in *The Dark Dancer*, Rajan wished to laugh away everything—idealism, saintliness, love, marriage, education, revolution, do-goodism, reconstruction—in his next novel. In fact, the earlier book seems continually to cast half-recognizable though distorted shadows on the later novel. Krishnan's parents have a short-list of eligible girls out of whom he chooses Kamala after an interview. In *Too Long in the West*, Columbia-educated Nalini, on her return to Mudalur, has to choose her husband from a bunch of applicants who have come in response to her eccentric father's advertisement in the *Hindu* in the 'matrimonial' column: "*Vadama* girl, educated yet domesticated. Fair of face, ravishing of form. Unprecedented paragon will marry whoever deserves her". This is to be no *arranged* marriage, but a modern *swayamvara*! In *The Dark Dancer*, Cambridge pursues Krishnan to India in the seductive shape of Cynthia who calls him 'Krish'; in *Too Long*, Columbia appears suddenly in Mudalur as Ernest the anti-malaria expert, and he calls Nalini 'Nelly' to her mother's disgust. The interviews, of course, are quite entertaining if not exhilarating, and Nalini's parents, the incredible Sambasivan and the waspish Lakshmi, make a droll enough couple. There is also Raman the barber, who is the local fire-eating revolutionary. Rajan's intention being obviously to write a farce, the art of caricature is freely pressed into service. There is a good deal in the novel that is pure fun, and we are not expected to take the suitors or the *swayamvara* seriously; and the mystery of the 'mangoes of Mudalur' is also no more than a joke. In tune with the spirit of comedy, when Nalini at last makes her choice, it comes as a surprise to everybody, though the situation is not lacking in poetic justice:

She walked past Kalyanasundaram, Satyamurti, Visvakarman and Kubera. There was no hesitation in her steps or in her eyes. She

walked serenely past Ernest, who stood looking at her dumbfounded, too thunderstruck even to aim his movie camera. She reached the edge of the fire where Raman stood. The corners of her mouth turned gently upwards. With a humble bow and an expression of impish solicitude she hung the garland carefully round her neck.

Then follow exchanges between them, not unworthy of the celebrated Katherina and Petruchio. In *The Dark Dancer*, Krishnan's difficulties begin after his marriage; here in *Too Long*, Nalini's end with hers. From henceforth she is mistress of the situation, she takes charge of Mudalur as well as Raman, and effects a tremendous transformation which is thus summed up in the official report of the Community Development Officer: "a place prosperous without even a plan for survival, flourishing upon its own perversity...and ruled erratically by feminine caprices".

A former President of the Oxford Union, a brilliant journalist, and the author of the autobiographical *I Go West*, D. F. Karaka published two novels nearly thirty years ago, *Just Flesh* (1940) and *There Lay the City* (1941). *Just Flesh* is a novel of English life, set in the nineteen thirties; the story is interesting, but the issue between father and son—Ronald and John—is not properly subsumed in the action. The ideological clash between two generations has been exploited, among others, by Turgenev in his *Fathers and Sons* and Samuel Butler in *The Way of All Flesh*. It is also the theme of Edmund Gosse's autobiographical *Father and Son*. But in *Just Flesh*, the Conservative father and his Socialist son merely strike melodramatic poses and spout hysterical speeches. *There Lay the City*, Karaka's second novel, is located in Bombay in the first years of Hitler's war. Sir Udul Boice, who is described as "a Churchill in the office...a Chamberlain at home", is driven by the war to suicide. Judy and her lover, and the many other characters, are all somehow affected by the war—and death and mutilation and suffering are constant refrains in the book, felt in the heart even when not seen with the eyes. The story-teller's talent is obviously there, but Karaka is too much of a journalist in a perpetual hurry to be able to find the time for serious creative writing.

Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof* (1956) preceded John Braine's more famous *Room At the Top* (1957). Bond's boyish

hero, Rusty, is quite unlike the brash go-getter, Joe Lampton of Braine's novel. Rusty is an English boy, an orphan, brought up at Dehra Dun by the missionaries, John Harrison and Mrs. Harrison. Being carefully insulated from all contact with Indians, Rusty is eaten up by his solitariness. His escapade on the day of the festival of Holi provokes his guardian's sadistic fury, and Rusty decides to shift for himself. He makes friends with the young men, Somi and Ranbir, and acquires a taste for Indian dishes and learns to rough it out in 'native' surroundings. Feeling quite at home in the triple world of "the bazaar, and India, and life itself"—a world that the Harrisons had forbidden him to enter—he relishes all the rush and noise and confusion of this reality:

The boy plunged into the throng of busting people; the road was hot and close, alive with the cries of vendors and the smell of cattle and ripening dung. Children played hopscotch in alleyways or gambled with coins, scuffling in the gutter for a lost anna. And the cows moved leisurely through the crowd, nosing around for paper and stale, discarded vegetables; the more daring cows helping themselves at open stalls. And above the uneven tempo of the noise came the blare of a loudspeaker playing a popular piece of music.

He secures a job as teacher to the boy Kishen Kapoor, and is also permitted to occupy a small room on the roof at his father's house. Rusty soon develops calf-love for Meena, Kishen's mother, but her sudden death in a car accident ends the incipient romance. Kapoor having remarried, Kishen and Rusty attempt a new experiment in living on their own. The world of adolescent youth is vividly realized in these pages, and the enchantment of Rusty's discovery of the real India is communicated to the reader as well. Since *The Room on the Roof* appeared, Ruskin Bond has published another novel, *The Last Tiger* (1968) and two collections of short stories, *The Neighbour's Wife* and *My First Love*. He is undoubtedly a writer with talent, and he does understand the mind of young people.

Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* (1968) is, perhaps, distantly inspired by Albert Camus' *The Outsider*. The narrator-hero, Sindi Oberoi, finds himself in the predicament of a 'foreigner' wherever he might be, Kenya, Uganda, England, America, India,

for people say "You are still a stranger, you don't belong here"! Of mixed parentage (mother English, father Kenyan Indian), Sindi has had his education in England, fallen in and out of love with Anna and Kathy, before coming to Boston for further education. There he makes friends with June Blyth who presently becomes his mistress, and with a young Indian student, Babu Rao Khemka. A fantastic triangular relationship develops between them resulting at last in Babu's death while driving his car in a condition of acute mental strain, followed not long afterwards by June's suicide when she is *enceinte*. Coming to Delhi, he meets old Khemka and is offered a job by him. In his conversations with Sheila, Babu's sister, Sindi glosses over the actual circumstances leading to her brother's death; it was only an accident, Sindi assures her. But in the course of the zig zag narration, alternating between the present in Delhi and the recent past in Boston, the truth circumstantially comes out. Albeit he is "the saddest man" Sheila has ever known, by facing the truth Sindi at last purges himself of the ghosts of the past, and this gives him the objectivity and the strength to deal with the crisis in Khemka's firm following his arrest. Towards the end, Sindi takes "a general stock" of himself in these terms:

In many ways the past had been a waste, but it had not been without its lessons. I had started adult life as a confused adolescent, awesomely engrossed with myself, searching for wisdom and the peace that comes with it. The journey had been long and tedious and still was not over. But even as I was distracted, the randomness of existence had led me towards the target like a programmed missile. It had thrown me, Anna and Kathy and Babu and June, each working on his own random destiny....Circumstances and events had led to my detachment from all of them. But, as Sheila had pointed out, I couldn't be detached from the world and remain attached to myself....

And the future?...there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done; perhaps, if I were lucky, even a chance to redeem the past.

Well, he could at least try to save Khemka's firm from liquidation. Here's something to do, and Sheila too is not unwilling to give him a free hand. For a first novel, *The Foreigner* is a well-plotted briskly written piece. The issue between detachment and involvement, indifference and commitment, going it alone and communion, is posed prominently enough, but not

properly consumed in the action or the characterization. There is a colourless cosmopolitan quality about the novel that is somewhat disconcerting; or, rather, the novel fails to evoke convincingly a sense of place. These are rootless people tossed about by the wind of chance, and the uninvolved and the blindly involved alike find themselves prisoners of one or another kind. In his more recent novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of hapless rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery.

A brief reference may be made to a few more novels. Dhan Gopal Mukerji of an earlier generation was a popular writer whose *Rama the Hero of India* (1931) told the story of the *Ramayana* in an engaging manner. He published many other fictional narratives—*The Master Monkey*, *Kari the Elephant*, *Gay-Neck*, *Ghond the Hunter*, *My Brother's Face*, *The Chief of the Herd*—which became children's favourites. *My Brother's Face* is partly autobiographical, and is among the best of his stories. An adept at portraying Indian village life no less than the life of man and beast in the wilds and jungles of tropical India, Dhan Gopal Mukerji can almost be called the Indian Kipling—sometimes, indeed, more satisfying than Kipling.

A retired civil servant, S. Y. Krishnaswamy has attempted in his *Kalyani's Husband* (1957) a study of the advocate, Sekhar, who drifts from his wife, Kalyani, a busy medical practitioner, to a woman of easy virtue; the prodigal, however, returns home at last—not a little dazed on account of his escapade—and reawakens to sanity. A Milton scholar, M. V. Rama Sarma has published a novel, *The Stream* (1956), which presents the predicament of Gopalam the obscure helplessly caught, like Hardy's Jude, between two women, and finding himself unable to establish a satisfying relationship with either of them. *The Long, Long Days* (1960) is described by its author, P. M. Nityanandan, as "an attempt to cut a broad swath of fun through a literary field at present overgrown with serious preoccupations". His subject is college life in Madras, and provides abundant entertainment. One immediately recognises such variations of the young idea as Krishnan, Appan, Naidu, Gopinath and Nirmala, and teachers like Natarajan (the Principal), Ramaswamy and Ven-

kata Iyer; and the episodes too—the Fresh Graduates' Day, for example, or the fancy dress competition—are true to type. Another fresh novel, *The Wound of Spring* (1961) by S. Menon Marath, has (as Mr. Nityanandan would say) more "serious preoccupations". Here the theme is the impact of change on a matriarchal Nayar family in Malabar during the nineteen twenties at the time of the Moplah rising. Parvati Amma, her sons Govindan and Unni, and the proliferating clan give life to the novel, and the process of slow disintegration is something that could be *seen* and not merely inferred. His more recent *The Sale of an Island* (1968) is set in the Kuttanad region, and concerns the people who have lived in a small island fringing the coast for generations, but now face eviction by the man who has bought the place. Jatindra Mohan Ganguli's *The Fisherman of Kerala* (1967) is about Raman who is deeply involved in the work of the Party during the 1957 general elections in Kerala. The fisherfolk are convincingly drawn, and action and characterization forcefully show how politics can madden peaceful folk and transform them into engines of hate and creatures of alienation. In Ganguli's *Bond of Blood* (1967), the theme is the communal frenzy that terrorized Calcutta in 1946. But even a nightmare can have lucid intervals, and the longest night must dissipate itself at last with the coming of a new dawn. In Ganguli's novel, Saila wades through the mud and the murkiness and emerges into the light of life and marries Fatima the Muslim girl.

There is, finally, *Delinquent Chacha* (1967), a brilliant first novel by Ved Mehta. His autobiographical *Face to Face* (1957) and *Walking the Indian Streets* (1960) were followed by *Fly and the Fly-Bottle* (1963), a series of essays based on interviews with contemporary philosophers and historians and *The New Theologian* (1966), a companion volume on certain European Christian thinkers. If Ved Mehta squeezes intellectual entertainment out of his encounters with hard-headed historians, philosophers and theologians, here in *Delinquent Chacha* we have pure—almost transcendent—fun. The good-for-nothing 'uncle' or 'chacha' is a fairly typical figure in Indian society. He may be the father of 13 children (as *Delinquent Chacha* is), but he retains his boyish immaturity and irrepressibility; he is

three-parts fool and one part knave; his mind is filled with the most extravagant bits of pseudo-knowledge; and he has a philosophy of his own, not irrelevant to the pace of life—and the rat-race—in the modern world. Independence and partition are not to his liking. He hankers after the 'good old days', and is more English than Englishmen—though, of course, after a fashion of his own. When Kakā his nephew (one of many) leaves for Oxford for higher education, Delinquent Chacha decides to follow him. Once in London, he is thrown on his own devices. He becomes Porter at the All-India Taj Mahal Curry, Chutney and Soup Restaurant and sports the imaginary title, C. M. G. (Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George). He is invited to be a guest speaker at a meeting of the Model United Nations at Oxford. He orders expensive clothes, and makes an explosive appearance at Oxford. He waxes enthusiastic about the Taj Mahal at Agra, and goes on and on, as if nothing can stop him:

Here, ladies and gentlemen, is a building of milk-white marble, and here the terraces, gardens, turfs, and still waters....The sheer, limpid, frozen beauty of this sweet dream in marble alters by the hour of the day, even as Lord Krishna changed his incarnations....Oh, ladies and gentlemen, think not that the Taj belongs only to India. It belongs to you.

A Pakistani delegate now claims that the Taj should belong to Pakistan alone. Alterations and gesticulations follow, and Delinquent Chacha is accused of "masquerading as a man, with a handle to his name" when he is no more than an ex-loafer and the present porter at a London restaurant. The matter makes a hit in the papers, and his tailors sue him in court for obtaining credit on false pretences. Delinquent Chacha conducts his own defence, throws counsel, judge and jury into confusion, and gets acquitted. In the end we find him dictating a letter to the Queen, requesting her to make him "in a hurry" a Knight of the Order of the Garter ("C. M. G. is not enough"). He would like to have a coat of arms too, indicating his three hobbies: cards, love of people, and addiction to coffee and eating places. Delinquent Chacha is unsinkable! "Actually, in a sense", as the *Observer* editorially commented on the Oxford

meeting fiasco, "it is not so much an indictment of him as of ourselves". The novel too is, indeed, a satire on Indians who have madly gone foreign, but the light of satire is turned as much on Britain as on India—for no nation, after all, has a monopoly of self-deception, vanity, priggishness and folly.

A survey of fiction should not omit a reference to short stories, but these defy classification. The novelists, Venkataramani, Shanker Ram, S. K. Chettur, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Anita Desai, have all published short stories also. Tagore, of course, was a great short story writer. Of the rest, Manjeri Isvaran deserves special mention. Isvaran was a poet as well as writer of fiction, and he was a master of the art of the short story. His long short story, *Immersion*, is surely one of the finest short stories of our time. Chance trips us and gives a sudden villainous twist to our destinies, and the clear pool is muddied beyond repair, the full-blown flower is blasted for ever. In evoking a scene, sketching a character, or insinuating the irony and the pity at the heart of life, Isvaran is verily an adept. Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Abbas and Khushwant Singh, have all given us collections of short stories. Abbas and Khushwant Singh are apt to be satirical where Isvaran and Raja Rao are suggestive or poetic. Anand's stories, like his novels, have great vitality, and a story like 'The Lost Child' is something of a masterpiece, tender and deeply moving. Narayan's is an unruffled art, and still waters could run deep. In his *One Thousand Nights on a Bed of Stones* (1957) and *The Black Sun* (1964), Abbas makes no secret of the fact that he has axes to grind, but at least he feels strongly about certain things. 'One Thousand Nights', for instance, describes with excruciating candour the plight of pavement dwellers in Bombay, 'Wheat and Roses' brings out the contrast between living somehow and living the good life, and 'Cartoon' presents two women, Khoki and Cookie, as an identity in seeming difference. The title-piece in Khushwant Singh's recent collection, *A Bride for the Sahib* (1967), is a pitiless skinning-alive of the 'sahib' Mr. Sen's layers of sophistication, but in other stories—'A Love Affair in London', for example—pity and poetry come breaking in. Manoj Das's *Song for Sunday* (1967)

is a first collection of short stories by an Oriya writer, and some of the pieces are very good. Numerous short stories are also appearing in the regional languages, and some of them have been translated into sensitive English: Amrita Pritam's long short story, *Doctor Dev*, Premchand's *The Chess-Players*, Purasu Balakrishnan's *The Golden Bangle*, and Rajaji's *Stories for the Innocent*, to name only a few.

Novels and short stories are appearing at a steadily increasing pace, for journals and radio stations need them, and the spread of literacy and the popularity of the new mass media have created a growing audience avid for light reading and programmes on the air. But there is a difference between the merely contrived novel or short story and the piece of fiction that seems, as it were, to have demanded utterance—that almost seems to have written itself out. Many must write before a few stand out from the crowd. The future of Indian fiction, and of Indo-Anglian fiction, is indeed full of promise. Recent fiction has given ample evidence of vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity. But, perhaps, a caution is called for; while the writer of fiction must needs observe the world about him with the conscientious care and rigorous discipline of a scientific researcher, these alone—though they are certainly necessary—are not enough. The quality of his mind and soul alone, and not any merely laborious accumulation of data or expenditure of industry, can impart to his writing that Promethean heat of life which transfigures—surprising and satisfying us at the same time—the 'lie' of fiction into the utter 'truth' of actuality.

A Pageant of Prose

It is a truism that verse art or the art of poetry is more ancient than prose art, although of course people have always been unconsciously *talking* prose since the beginnings of human speech. It is *recorded* prose that is more recent than verse or poetry. Indian prose writing in English, however, came rather earlier than writing in verse, and the prose writers—though not necessarily known to fame—are far more numerous than the poets and poetasters. Two centuries ago, sundry Indians simply had to learn to speak or write in English, but literary expression—whether in prose or in verse—was only a later development. That had to come too, and come it did. Talented Indians learned to use the English medium for translation, petitioning, journalism, law, oratory, political agitation, social reform propaganda, and educational, historical and philosophical studies. A disciplined study of English language and literature in the new colleges and universities meant for its beneficiaries the end of insularity and the streaming in of Western thought-currents, and in the result there was witnessed the first stirrings of a transvaluation of values. The emergence of the English-educated in different parts of the sub-continent meant also the gradual rise of an all-India elite, many of whom were able to rise above regional, linguistic, religious and caste barriers, and think in terms of one India, a self-governing India, and a democratic India. There were no doubt many scholars in Sanskrit and Persian and Arabic, scholars too in the great indigenous languages, and they were unassailable on their own ground and they carried the torch of tradition with commendable integrity and fervour. Yet even they found, as the years passed, that a knowledge of English could give a new dimension to their intellectual equipment and a new power to their utterance. As Dr. Mohinimohan Bhattacharjee said in the course of a lecture in 1953:

So far as literary creation goes, it is worthy of note that it has been almost the monopoly of people well-grounded in English. No Sanskritist ignorant of English has contributed anything worth the name to modern Bengali or any other modern Indian creative literature. Treaties on grammar or composition or school texts have indeed been written by many: commentaries on Sanskrit works too have been produced by some together with translations of religious works etc. But original work has always had as authors persons well-versed in English literature. Mention may be made of Michael Madhusudan, Bankim, Tagore in Bengal, Premchand in Bihar, Bhai Bir Singh in the Punjab and others. These have invented new idioms and techniques and have often made daring departures from old literary practices. Drama, epic, lyric, the short story, the novel of adventure, the psychological novel—all reveal the influence of the West, of England, of France, of Belgium, and, today, even of Russia.

The Western impact, the infusion of English literature and European thought, and the resulting cross-fertilisation have thus been the means of quickening the interplay and circulation of ideas and the emergence of a new literature, a new climate of hope and endeavour in the country, and a bold marching towards new horizons.

As we have seen earlier, from the great Rammohan Roy flowed, as from a fountain-head, divers streams of renascent activity,—religious awakening, social reform, the new education, women's emancipation, literary revival, political consciousness,—each carried forward by its own dedicated spirits. Keshub Chunder, Dwaraknath Tagore, Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra, Rajnarain Bose and Naba Gopal Mitra were among the intrepid path-finders in the Bengal of almost a century ago, and there were their counterparts in Bombay and Madras and the Punjab and the region we now call Uttar Pradesh. Presently, political education and activity came to occupy a more and more obsessive position in the national life. Leaders like Surendranath Banerjea, Dadabhai Naoroji, W. C. Bonnerjee, Saiyyed Ahmed Khan, Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Ananda Charlu, Rahimtullah Sayani, Sankaran Nair, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Narayan Chandavarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Lal Mohan Ghose, K. T. Telang, V. Krishnaswami Aiyar, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and even extremists and revolutionaries like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai, V. D. Savarkar and Barindra Kumar Ghose had all been—to a greater

or lesser extent—beneficiaries of English education, and they had pondered over the lessons of British history, the course of the French Revolution, the War of American Independence, and the struggle for the unification of Italy. The growth of political consciousness in India can be traced from obscure beginnings in small groups led by pioneering individuals, through the foundation of the British Indian Association of 1851 and the Indian Association of 1876, to the inauguration of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The reviving Hindu and Muslim consciousness now found a common national platform, and the eyes of thinking Indians were resolutely turned, not towards the past, but towards the future. Evaluating the main force of the Western impact and the total Indian reaction, Dr. R. C. Majumdar says at the end of his three lectures on India's Struggle for Freedom:

A new spirit imported from the West galvanized static India into dynamic activities which resulted in the growth of political theories and patriotism, development of an all-India political organization, and the evolution of Hindu and Muslim nationalism, each based on the common bond of religion, culture and historical tradition of past glory and greatness, as well as an Indian nationalism, based on the unity of political interests in securing political power for the Indians.

A reference has been made already to the monumental labours of Rammohan Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen, Ranade, K. T. Telang and Vivekananda—men truly cast on an Olympian mould. They were worthily followed by others during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. A gallant race of hard-headed men, terribly earnest, utterly sincere,—some of them even myriad-minded men,—they were the intellectual elite, and although they lacked actual political power, they provided the kind of leadership that the country then needed and which they alone could give. At a time when there was a sharp difference of opinion on most issues—religious reformation, abolition of the custom of *sati*, education through the English medium, cooperation with the British rulers—it was not surprising that pamphleteering in English became a recognised method of public debate. Some of the best minds of the time gravitated to journalism—especially journalism in English

—because that was the one effective way they knew of appealing to the intelligentsia, and English writing had an all-India appeal as well. A former editor of the *Statesman*, W. C. Wordsworth has paid this well-deserved tribute to the Indo-Anglian journalists of the nineteenth century:

India remembers among its own journalists the reformers Rammohan Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen; Surendranath Banerjea who became a minister in Bengal; Haris Chandra Mukherji; the Ghose family of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*; Ranade, Malabari and Tilak of Bombay. It remembers them as few journalists are remembered in England; they live in the mind as instructors live, for India reveres its teachers. ...Law, journalism and public affairs are activities that many have combined and still combine. Nor is it accident when prominent Indian journalists have been connected with the work of education; journalism and education are looked on as different aspects of the one noble activity of giving India the knowledge it needs.

Again, in his *Literary History of India*, R. W. Frazer dismisses the notion that the new leaders of India were but the “bastard bantlings of a Western civilization”; rather were they “creative geniuses...destined in the future to shine clear as the first glowing sparks sent out in the fiery furnace where the new and the old were fusing”. Paying his tribute to Sisir Kumar Ghose of the *Patrika*, the great Tilak said in 1918:

Journalism—independent and free journalism—was not an easy task in those days—sixty years ago—when many of you were charmed with Government service. You looked upon such a man (Sisir Kumar Ghose) as rather eccentric—he might be independent, might be honest, but certainly not wordly....He stood alone and his conscience was his stand. He thought that he had a message to give to the world—he thought he had a duty to do and did it unflinchingly. That was the man who led Bengal in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Another Bengali journalist, Satis Chandra Mukherjee, played an equally important role as educationist, journalist and political evangelist. He founded the *Bhagvat Chatuspati* in 1895, the magazine *Dawn* in 1897, the Dawn Society in 1902, and the National Council in 1906. In Bombay, Ranade was associated with the *Indu Prakash*, to which young Sri Aurobindo contributed the series of articles entitled ‘New Lamps for Old’,—more political dynamite than journalism! In Madras, Sankaran Nair—a leader

of the bar—was the inspiration behind both the extremist paper, the *Hindu*, edited by G. Subramania Aiyar and, later, by Kasturiranga Ayyangar, as also the ‘moderate’ paper, the *Indian Patriot*, edited by Karunakara Menon. Sankaran Nair’s younger contemporary, S. Srinivasa Iyengar—another leader of the Madras bar—has been described as “a political ideas factory... every political idea that fell from him... the next day was given to the world from the editorial columns of the *Hindu*, the *Indian Patriot* or the *Swadesa Mitran*. Every one of the above papers was edited by well-known persons, but when new ideas were forced to their notice, they succumbed to their novelty and force”. And both Sankaran Nair and Srinivasa Iyengar became Presidents of the Indian National Congress. They took journalism, as they took law, politics and social reform, in their easy stride, and there was neither littleness nor ineptitude in anything they did. No other country, perhaps, can claim such a galaxy as the Indo-Anglian journalists of the pre-Independence era, for men like Sisir Ghose, Satis Mukherjee, Surendranath Banerjea, Behramji Malabari, Sri Aurobindo, M. G. Ranade, Tilak, N. C. Kelkar, Annie Besant, K. Natarajan, G. Subramania Ayyar, Kasturiranga Ayyangar, T. Prakasam, C. Y. Chintamani, Muhammad Ali, A. Rangaswami Aiyangar, C. R. Das, Lajpat Rai, Gandhiji himself, M. N. Roy, K. M. Munshi, S. A. Brelvi, Subhas Bose, these and others were not just ‘editors’, but were really tribunes of the people—leaders, teachers and prophets rolled in one. Since independence, however, the journalist is but seldom doubled with the active politician. Of course, Acharya Kripalani edited the *Vigil* for a time, and the nonagenarian Rajaji is still a regular contributor to the *Swarajya*, his mind as sharp and his phrasing as crisp as ever. But these are among the exceptions that only prove the rule. Politics and journalism are no more vocations; they have become professions. As in many other walks of life, since independence a scramble for position and emoluments is fast taking the place of the old idealism and sense of dedication and readiness for sacrifice, with the result that the journalist, the politician and even the educationist are better paid or recompensed today, but their words—spoken or written—carry less authority and wield much less influence than in the days of the struggle for freedom.

Among the earliest practitioners of English prose (and verse) were the Cavally brothers—Venkata Ramaswamy, Venkata Lakshmaiah and Venkata Boriah. The latter's dissertation on the Jains appeared in 1801 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.¹ Rammohan Roy's tract on *sati*, cast in the form of an argument between a critic and a defender of the custom, appeared in 1818. Sastra was invoked in defence of the custom; and hence the opponent of *sati* had to cite Sastra in his turn:

....Here Munoo directs that after the death of her husband, the widow should pass her life as an ascetic. Therefore the laws given by Unggira and the others, whom you have quoted, being contrary to the laws of Munoo, cannot be accepted because the Veda declares: 'Whatever law is contrary to the law of Munoo is not commendable'....

And so on! In 1825, Venkata Ramaswamy's English translation of Venktadhvari's *Visvagunadarsana* appeared, with a dedication to Sir Francis Macnaughten: "The Natives of India of every description, My Lord, regard you as the Sun of Justice...your transcendent reputation, My Lord, nothing can deprive us of and like the 'Rose of the East' it will long continue to shed its perfume over our native land". Of the 92 subscribers who had made the printing of the book possible, only nine were Indians, Rammohan and Dwaraknath Tagore being among them. Two years earlier, in 1823, a memorial had been presented to Macnaughten, Judge of the Supreme Court, signed by Rammohan, Dwaraknath, and four others, protesting against the Rule and Ordinance of 14 March of that year, curtailing the freedom of the press. It was a dignified representation (obviously the handiwork of Rammohan Roy), and the concluding passage may be quoted here:

Every good Ruler, who is convinced of the imperfections of human nature and reverences the Eternal Governor of the world, must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast Empire; and therefore he will be anxious to afford every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may re-

¹ N. Venkata Rao, in 'Pioneers of English Writing in India' (*Annals of Oriental Research of the University of Madras*, Vol. XVIII, Part II 1963).

quire his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained Liberty of Publication is the only effectual means that can be employed. And should it ever be abused, the established Law of the Land is very properly armed with sufficient powers to punish those who may be found guilty of misrepresenting the conduct or character of Government, which are effectually guarded by the same Laws to which individuals must look for protection of their reputation and good name....

Rammohan's letter to Lord Amherst on the need for English education in India (rather than education through Sanskrit) has already been referred to in an earlier chapter, and a perusal of his collected speeches and writings will enable one to form an opinion regarding his singular mastery of English prose as a weapon for exposition, argument, propaganda and exhortation. In this, as in other avenues of activity, Rammohan was verily a pioneer.

The next important figure was Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who wrote narrative poetry in English, worked as a teacher-cum-journalist at Madras, and made a lasting contribution to Bengali poetry with his epic, *Meghanad Badh*. At the age of nineteen he had renounced Hinduism and embraced Christianity, and felt half-bewitched by the Anglo-Saxon rulers and the English language. In a lecture on 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Hindu' given in 1854, Michael Madhusudan gave unrestrained expression to his enthusiasm for the British rulers and affirmed his faith that they would be able to renovate the 'fallen' Hindu race. This excessive enthusiasm for things British and the excessive derogation of things Indian (or Hindu) were characteristic of the attitude of the newly educated (the 'Derozio men', as some of them were called), and of course there was a decided shift a generation later, action and reaction being about equal and opposite. But the sentiments notwithstanding, the following passage will illustrate Michael Madhusudan's handling of English, his exuberant eloquence, his missionary zeal, his wide-ranging scholarship and his firm faith in the historic role of the British in India:

I stand before you—not as a Columbus, proudly claiming the meed of a discoverer of unknown worlds; I stand before you—not as a Newton, whose god-like vision penetrated the blue depths of ether

and saw a new and a bright orb, cradled in infinity; I deal in no mysteries; I am no sophist, ravishing the ear with melodious yet unmeaning sounds; captivating the eye with sparkling yet meretricious ornamentalism—beautiful yet artificial flowers, glittering yet false diamonds. No! The fact, I enunciate, is a simple one; even he who runneth may read it. But its simplicity ought not to destroy its grave importance. You all know it—you all see it. Why has Providence given this queenly, this majestic land for a prey and a spoil to the Anglo-Saxon? Why? I say, it is the mission of the Anglo-Saxon to renovate, to regenerate, to Christianise the Hindu—to churn this vast ocean that it may restore the things of beauty now buried in its liquid wilderness; and nobly is he seconded—will be seconded—by the science and the literature of his sea-girt fatherland, the literature of his country, baptised in the pure fountain of Eternal Love!....

I have heard the pastoral pipe of the Mantuan Swain...I have listened to the melodies of gay Flaccus, that lover of the sparkling bowl, and the joyous banquet...I have seen gorgeous Tragedy, in sceptred pall come sweeping by, presenting Thebes' or Pelops' line, I am no stranger to the eloquence of fiery Demosthenes, of calm and philosophic Cicero...I have wept over the fatal war of the implacable Kaurava and the heroic Pandava; I have grieved over the sufferings of her who wore and lost the fatal ring; I have wandered with Hafiz on the banks of Rocknabad...and seen Rustum shedding tears of agony over his brave but hapless son; I have laughed with Moliere...I have visited the lightless regions of Hades with Dante; I know Laura's sad lover who gave himself to fame with melodious tears: but give me the literature, the language of the Anglo-Saxon! Banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins: but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, banish him not thy Harry's company; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world! I say, give me the language—the beautiful language of the Anglo-Saxon!

A speech like Michael Madhusudan's is characteristic of what Humayun Kabir, in his Marratt Memorial Lecture, has called 'the Age of Innocence' in Indo-British relations; it was followed presently—say, after 1857, the year of the 'Mutiny'—by the 'Age of Knowledge' or the 'Age of Experience'. One of the forceful spokesmen of the new Age was Surendranath Banerjee, whose public career was to extend over a period of half a century. In 1877-78, he made an all-India tour, speaking in English at Banaras, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Aligarh, Delhi, Lahore, Amritsar, Bombay, Poona, Madras and other cities—a veritable Midlothian campaign that was to set the example for other, and even more, tempestuous tours by a

Vivekananda, a Bepin Chandra Pal, a Tilak, an Aurobindo, a Gandhi, a C. R. Das, a Rajaji, a Nehru, a Subhas Bose, and numberless others. In an early speech on 'England and India' delivered at Calcutta in 1877, Banerjea could still affirm: "I verily believe that the establishment of British power in India was providential". Britain's role in India was to facilitate India's passage from the mediaeval to the modern age. "England has introduced a revolutionary agent of mighty potency into this country", he said; "that revolutionary agent is English education". As a result certain social evils had been successfully tackled, and the character of the people too had changed for the better; but in other spheres there was room for dissatisfaction:

Has England fulfilled her mission in teaching us the great lesson of self-government? And here the scene is completely changed. The curtain must now fall upon that spectacle of ineffable beauty which upto this time had rivetted our attention—the spectacle of a great country struggling to fulfil its sacred trust...I ask the question, do we govern ourselves, or do we not? I am afraid the question must be answered in the negative...

I may say, gentlemen, that the battle for our rights and privileges has already begun, that bloodless battle in which truth decides the contest, that bloodless battle in which victors and vanquished have each reasons to congratulate themselves; and if we are Indians, if we are Aryans, the victory will be ours.

In Banerjea's speech we can see that, although the Age of Innocence is ended, the age of disillusion has not begun. We are still in the twilight period of the years before the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885.

At about the same time Surendranath Banerjea was electrifying audiences with his flights of eloquence, Lal Behari Day, a Hindu convert to Christianity, was earning a modest livelihood as a preacher, journalist and schoolmaster. His novel, *Govinda Samanta: Bengal Peasant Life*, which won a £50 prize, appeared in 1874; his *Folk-Tales of Bengal* followed in 1883; and these two books have been republished, along with his unfinished autobiography ('Recollections of My School-Days') by Mahadevprasad Saha for Editions Indian (Calcutta, 1969). *Govinda Samanta* is the story of a peasant's life from birth to death; it also tells incidentally a good deal about life in a Bengali vil-

lage, the romance and routine of everyday life, the complex of monotony, excitement and desperation, the insensate greed of the moneylenders, the petty tyranny of the zemindars, the ravages of periodic famines and the inequities of the indigo-planters. Actually, *Govinda Samanta* is more a collection of sketches of rural life than a novel. Lal Behari Day does indeed call his book "authentic history", and describes Bengali rural life—which in essentials is the same all over India—with an observant and understanding eye, and he doesn't hesitate to lash at current abuses. Individual chapters carry epigraphs culled from the poets—Chaucer, Crabbe, Cowper, Gray, Goldsmith, Longfellow, Wordsworth, Campbell, Homer, Virgil, Habakkuk! The style of writing is now and then quaintly ceremonial, but the characters are drawn and the scenes recalled with a natural ease. The village astrologer, the village schoolmaster, the match-maker, the Hindu widow, the 'nectar-mouthed' mother-in-law and the mahajan are prototypical of Indian rural life. The Ladies' Parliament on the banks of the village tank anticipates the River Scenes at Alavanti in K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller*. There is a gentle spray of humour over the narrative, and even castigation is apt to take on a subdued tone. Here, for example, is the portrait of Mr. Murray the indigo-planter:

He was a gentleman of good family and of some education. His manners, especially to Europeans, were exceedingly pleasing. He kept an open table, and his hospitality to Europeans was proverbial. He paid a monthly subscription of ten rupees to an English school established in a neighbouring village for the education of native youth; he had a large medicine chest out of which he used to deal out freely quinine and other drugs to the sick people of the villages, and his name, I believe, has been found in the subscription lists of the Tract and Bible Societies, and even in the reports of one or two missionary societies carrying on their operations in Bengal. How all this tallies with his barbarous inhumanity towards the peasantry, his oppressive measures, and his acts of spoliation, I do not pretend to understand, but there is no doubt that both these classes of facts are true; and it is the business of a philosopher—not of a matter-of-fact historian like myself—to reconcile them.

Day the story-teller is also the commentator, and doesn't hesitate now and then to make a point for the "gentle" reader's edification: for example, he is at pains to show that ordinarily

"Hindu widows are not only not ill-treated but they meet with a vast deal of sympathy". Old widows, he points out, "are often the guides and counsellors of those who style themselves the lords of creation". Again, after a vivid description of Ayudha Puja, Day can hardly refrain from drawing a comparison between this exhibition of religious fervour and the naked secularism of the European proletariat:

This was the *pūja* of Visvakarma, the World-Maker, the Hephaistos of the Hindu pantheon, the patron of arts and manufactures in the holy land of Bharata.... On that day Govinda set up in a corner of his house the plough, the hoe, the sickle, and other implements of husbandry; Nanda, his hammer, his anvil, and his bellows; Kapila, his axe, his wedge, his inclined plane; Chatura, his razors, his basin, and the sharp instruments for paring off the nails; Bokaram, his loom and shuttle; the fisherman, his nets, his rods, and lines; the oil-man, his oil-mill; the potter, his wheel; the mason, his trowel and plumb-line; the shoe-maker, his awl; the washerman, his beetle, his mallet, and his ironing instruments—they all washed and cleaned these instruments, and set them apart for the day from ordinary use.... The great Architect of the Universe, the Master Mason, is worshipped by these simple artificers without any other visible representations than the symbols of the arts; and we cannot but think that this periodical and public acknowledgement of the Creator by the working classes of Bengal is to be infinitely preferred to the absorbing secularism and practical atheism of the proletariat of some of the countries of Europe.

Govinda's story itself leisurely meanders through the pages of the novel, and there is a simple dignity in his end. He that had tilled his parental acres has had to become a hired labourer. He cannot reconcile himself to the change, he pines inwardly, he dies of a broken heart. It is not surprising that *Govinda Samanta*, on its first appearance, found many admirers in India as well as in England.

Day's *Folk-Tales*—there are 22 of them in the collection—are interestingly told, and one might mark the filiations between them and similar folk-tales current in other parts of India. These tales belong to an age when Man, Nature and God were bound by a natural kinship. People often established better rapport with Nature than with fellow human beings. Birds, animals and trees talk wisely, and take an interest in the vicissitudes of

human life, and one might find in a tree a truer friend than in a near blood-relation! There is the mingling of humour, whimsy and fantasy, and realism achieves co-existence with miraculism. A recurrent theme is the husband with two (or more) wives; the elder, *duo*, is the unloved and the younger, *suo*, is the well-beloved though undeservedly; one of the wives might even turn out to be a *rakshasi*; but, of course, evil is crushed in the end, and the good prosper. In 'The Evil Eye of Sani', Lakshmi and Saturn seek Sribatsa's verdict regarding their relative superiority, and since he favours the goddess, the evil god is in high dudgeon. But there is no Trojan War in the wake of Sribatsa's choice; after a three-year period of distress, he becomes a Child of Fortune again.

Day's 'Recollections of My School-Days' is important, not only as an early example of Indian autobiography in English, but also for the very valuable light it throws on education in Bengal in the nineteenth century. The movement from 'no education' to education through Sanskrit and Arabic, and again from such "false history, false astronomy, false medicine" to modern education through the English medium is described with animated interest. He is enthusiastic about Dr. Duff's "interrogatory method" of teaching, which brought out the best in the pupil instead of making him a mere receiver of knowledge. For the rest, Day's autobiography — incomplete though it is — reveals the image of the man; and shows how "slow rises worth by poverty depressed". The narrative is marked by such sincerity and candour that it can still be read with interest and profit.

After the Congress came into existence, there started the era of annual conferences, with formal presidential and other addresses, and long resolutions — all in English. The example of the Congress was followed with enterprising zeal by other all-India Bodies, and Social Conferences, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha Conferences, Youth Conferences, Women's Conferences, etc., were also held by rotation at various regional centres. Till almost the coming of Gandhiji thirty years later, the proceedings at these conferences were entirely in English. And, indeed, even afterwards, and till the present time, English has been used largely, though no more exclusively, as the medium of discussion. Now-a-days there are any number of all-India conferences—political, academic, technical, official, cultural, social—and many more seminars,

workshops, working-groups and what not, and in them all English is still being freely used. For functional purposes, then, English prose has enjoyed increasing vogue since 1885. Likewise, since the incorporation of the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Allahabad in the 19th century, and other Universities in the 20th, the annual Convocation addresses have been more or less serious exercises in the 'other harmony'. The annual Congress and the annual Convocation were occasions out of the ordinary, and since Congress Presidents and Convocation Orators were usually drawn from the intellectual leaders of the community, the addresses were read and discussed widely, as much for their substance as for the functional competence of the writing. A third area where prose was assiduously cultivated was English journalism, which attracted some of the best minds in the country. As mentioned already, it was not uncommon in pre-independence days for the same person to play more than one part in public life, and all worthily, and all fully deserving the country's gratitude.

Naturally enough, the Congress Presidents enjoyed great prestige, and to be elected President was once considered the greatest honour that could be conferred on an Indian. The first fifty names make an inspiring roll-call, and they include several of the great men who had distinguished themselves, not only as politicians, but also as lawyers, jurists, educationists, civil servants, physicians, journalists. The presidential addresses from 1885 to the coming of independence constitute an impressive body of political literature — one might even call it, in some respects, our 'basic' political literature. The range is disconcertingly wide, and some of the addresses were planned and laid out on a liberal scale. Muhammad Ali's address in 1923 was the longest, almost a book, and Gandhiji's next year was one of the shortest; but amplitude rather than brevity was the rule, and the addresses of Bishan Narayan Dhar, R. N. Mudholkar, Ambika Charan Mazumdar (the historian of the Congress), Annie Besant, Motilal Nehru, C. Vijayaraghavachariar and C. R. Das must also have taken two or three hours to read; and there is often the mingling of parables and statistics, quotations ancient and modern, sweet reasonableness and verbal fireworks, poetry and polemics, passion and prophecy.

The strategy of the first generation of leaders who organised the Congress was to concentrate on peaceful propaganda and per-

suasive petitioning. The speeches at the early sessions set the tone that was to remain undisturbed for several years. Speaking in 1886, Dadabhai Naoroji felt gratified that the gathering was so representative of all-India:

I ask whether in the most glorious days of Hindu rule, in the days of Rajahs like the great Vikram, you could imagine the possibility of a meeting of this kind, whether even Hindus of all different provinces of the kingdom could have collected and spoken as one nation. Coming down to the later empire of our friends, the Mahomedans, who probably ruled over a larger territory at one time than any Hindu monarch, would it have been, even in the days of the great Akbar himself, possible for a meeting like this to assemble, composed of all classes and communities, all speaking one language, and all having uniform and high aspirations of their own.

For the rest, while broadly reaffirming his faith in British justice, Dadabhai gently introduced towards the end the theme of Indian poverty, as if he would thereby prick the bubble of complacency in British as well as in certain indigenous quarters:

All the benefits we have derived from British rule, all the noble projects of our British rulers, will go for nothing if, after all, the country is to continue sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of destitution. At one time I was denounced as a pessimist; but now that we have it on the authority of our rulers themselves that we are very poor, it has become the right as well as the duty of this Congress to set forth its convictions, both as to this widespread destitution and the primary steps needful for its alleviation.

Next year, at Madras, Budruddin Tyabji too referred to the "representative" nature of the gathering, for there were over 600 delegates from all over the country. On the question of Muslim involvement in the Congress, he was emphatic that the leaders of the different communities — Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians — should work together "to obtain those great general reforms, those great general rights, which are for the common benefit of us all and which . . . have only to be earnestly and unanimously pressed upon Government to be granted to us". Like other leaders of the time, Tyabji too was not unwilling to play the loyalist tune for what it was worth and to caution his friends not to abuse the benefits of British rule:

Gentlemen, I trust that not only during the debates of this Congress, but on all occasions, we shall ever bear in mind and ever impress upon our countrymen that, if we are to enjoy the right of public discussion, the liberty of speech and liberty of the press, we must so conduct ourselves as to demonstrate by our conduct, by our moderation, by the justness of our criticisms, that we fully deserve these—the greatest blessings which an enlightened Government can confer upon its subjects.

In 1888, speaking at the annual session of the Congress, K. T. Telang was at pains to disclaim that they had asked for immediate self-government or parliamentary government, but he was at least bold enough to pick a quarrel with Lord Dufferin. The following passage does make a point, and makes it brilliantly:

The various charges which His Lordship makes against the Congress are charges which remind me of a certain definition which was once given of a crab, viz., that a crab is a red fish which walks backwards; and the criticism made upon that was that the definition was perfectly correct, except that the crab was not a fish, that it was not red, and that it did not walk backwards.

But by 1890, the tone changes somewhat, and behind the soothing words that still express faith in British justice, harsher notes too are heard. After 1890, the Age of Innocence is definitely dead, and beyond recall. For example, during 1893-94, Sri Aurobindo who had just returned to India from England and found service in Baroda wrote a series of articles 'New Lamps for Old' in the *Indu Prakash*, charging the Congress leaders with timidity and ineptitude. Nine years after the Congress had been founded, what was the position?

The walls of the Anglo-Indian Jericho stand yet without a breach, and the dark spectacle of Penury draws her robe over the land in greater volume and with an ampler sweep.

Sri Aurobindo's conclusion therefore was that "our appeal, the appeal of every high-souled and self-respecting nation, ought not to lie to the opinion of the Anglo-Indians, no, nor yet to the British sense of justice, but to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere fellow-feeling . . . with the silent and suffering people of India".

Further, the religious reform movements — Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj — and the occurrence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa made any slavish subservience to Christianity or British civilization a thing of the past. Even when influenced by Christianity, a leader like Keshub Chunder Sen would speak in a voice of his own. He admired the Paramahansa, he pondered deeply, he had the courage of his convictions. In an apology 'Am I an inspired Prophet?' (1883), Keshub laid bare his soul eschewing false pride and false modesty alike:

If I am mystical, am I not practical too? I am practical as an Englishman. If I am an Asiatic in devotion, I am a European in practical energy. My creed is not dreamy sentimentalism, not quietism, not imagination. Energy, yes, energy,—I have that in a very great measure in my character and in my Church. It is the vigour and energy of the Englishman and the American. My Church is a vast European Church full of resolution, heroism, strength, and vivacity. My Church has in it all the elements of European practical life. It encourages education, social reformation, political elevation, the improvement of women, the promotion of journalism, the advancement of science and material prosperity. Like a mighty river, the stream of national devotion comes into my Church from the Vedas and the Upanishads, the pantheistic books and mystic scriptures of ancient India. None can, none should, resist this torrent. But in my Church warm devotion and practical enthusiasm are commingled...I cannot indulge in dreams. I must work. I cannot be a drone. I must be a busy bee, always gathering sweets from all sorts of flowers in the Heavenly Father's garden...

The verbal excess notwithstanding, one can see what Keshub is driving at — he wants India to shake off her lethargy and engage in purposive and creative work. Keshub felt drawn to the Paramahansa, but wasn't his chosen disciple. It was left to Vivekananda to teach awakened India to come out of the Slough of Despond and face the world—even the Western world—with a new self-confidence and almost a sense of mission to global humanity. He made history by his appearance in 1893 at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, and his whirlwind tours in the West and in India made renascent Hinduism a force to reckon with, a fact of progressive unfoldment nurtured by the sap of a hoary tradition, yet receiving new warmth in the sunshine of modern life. And Vivekananda presented the spiritual philosophy behind Hindu-

ism in such a way that he seemed to lay his finger on the cardinal truth behind *all* religions. In the peroration to his Chicago address on Hinduism, he made this memorable affirmation:

. . . if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which holds no location in place or time; which is infinite, like the God it preaches; whose sun shines upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; not Brahmanic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mahomedan, but the sum-total of all these, yet still keeping infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms and find a place for every human being from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart above humanity . . . It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centred in aiding humanity to realise its own true and divine nature.

Offer such a religion and all nations will follow you. Asoka's council was a council of the Buddhistic faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlour-meeting . . .

May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews and the Father in Heaven of the Christians give strength to you to carry out your noble idea. The star arose in the East; it travelled steadily towards the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world, and now it is once again rising on the very horizon of the East, the borders of Tasifu, a thousand-fold more effulgent than ever it was before.

The several volumes of his Complete Works, published by the Advaita Ashrama, comprise courses of lectures on the different Yogas (Raja, Jnana, Bhakti and Karma) and on the *Gita*, and numerous talks, essays and letters covering sacred as well as secular themes. Like all great teachers, Vivekananda too made adroit use of figures of speech:

The human mind is like that monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy at the success of others, and last of all the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself all important. How hard to control such a mind! . . .

It is the screen that hides the Self, which is unchanging. The screen opens, and we find the Self behind it. All change is in the screen. In the saint the screen is thin, and the reality can almost shine through.

In the sinner the screen is thick, and we are able to lose sight of the truth that the Atman is there, as well as behind the saint's screen. When the screen is wholly removed, we find it never really existed—that we were the Atman and nothing else, even the screen is forgotten.

Unlike the general run of ecstasies, Vivekananda saw that mere other-worldliness wasn't enough; the body had to be fed before the soul's claim could be attended to. This was the reason why he ushered into being the Ramakrishna Mission to organize education, medical relief, and the building up of a dynamic, energetic and enlightened Indian society. He roundly rated the upper or privileged classes for their indifference to the plight of the poor and the downtrodden:

You, the upper classes of India,—do you think you are alive? You are but mummies ten thousand years old! It is among those whom your ancestors despised as 'walking carrions' that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real 'walking corpses'. Your houses, your furniture look like museum specimens . . . In this world of Maya, you are the real illusions, the mystery, the real mirage in the desert, you, the upper classes of India! You represent the past tense with all its varieties of form jumbled into one . . . let New India arise in your place. Let her arise—out of the peasant's cottage grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fishermen, the cobbler and the sweeper . . . These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude . . .

He no doubt emphasized the need for religion, but he was careful to add that it should be a 'man-making religion':

It is a man-making religion that we want. It is a man-making education that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. And here is the test of truth: Anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, Truth is all knowledge . . . Give up these weakening mysticisms and be strong.

Vivekananda spoke and wrote so often and with such intensity of feeling that he could hardly find the time or be in the mood to pause and refine his sentences. The words gushed out as it were, and carried with them the native energy and impetuosity of his mind and his feeling for the common people. The many volumes.

of his English prose constitute part of India's cultural history, but he should be counted more among our prophets and builders than among the mere masters of prose.

At about the same time Vivekananda was effecting a passage to the mind and heart of the West, the lesser known Behramji Malabari published the record of his impressions of England, *The Indian Eye on English Life* (1893). Malabari became a prominent publicist, journalist and social reformer, but in a passage like the following he sets out in brief the foundations of his religious belief:

It is permissible to believe and yet to inquire; to try to catch a glimpse of the why, the how, the whence, and the whither of our being, although we believe it to be all ordered for the best. Each of us has certain heart-longings which he will strive again and again to satisfy, however, hopeless the effort as shown by previous experience. I believe in the existence of a Creator, and in the beneficence of His design. I believe His law to be just, immutable, and universal. And yet I believe in the possibility of miracles, that is, of occurrences beyond my present limited vision, but neither impossible nor uncomfortable to the design and the law of His creation. I believe it is as well that man does not know all that is within and around him. But I cannot keep off certain vague yearnings to dip into the hidden . . . Is there anything wrong in this attitude of reverent inquiry? . . . I have sought consolation in the child-like faith of Arians and Semitics alike, who claim a half-loving half-fearing kinship with 'Our Father in Heaven'—till roused by the thunder and lightning of Zoroaster's voice waging eternal war on corruption and self-righteousness. I have been subdued by the charity of the Buddha, leading to nothingness as the goal of the something that is in me—till again roused by the larger charity of Christ, lifting me out of myself and bringing the regenerate life face to face with the Father once more. I have been fascinated by the vitality of Islam and the faith of its intrepid founder. I have dipped into shallower waters too, running from one or more of these everlasting sources. Some of them have convinced me without satisfying; others have satisfied me without convincing . . . Often does my spirit venture into the region of the unknown, perhaps the unknowable, only to return from her search, bruised and bleeding.

A Parsi himself, there is deep sincerity as well as wide tolerance in Malabari's outlook, and his prose too partakes of the quality of his sensitive and cultured mind.

Compared to Malabari, Mahadev Govind Ranade was a polymath, but shared with him an anxious concern for the moral and

social well-being of the people. Historian, economist, jurist, educationist, social reformer, Ranade was also one of the guiding spirits of the Prarthana Samaj. He wanted modern India to throw up, as of old, good and great men, teachers of mankind and benefactors of humanity. It was in the course of the address he delivered in 1896 on Rammohan Roy that Ranade expatiated on the qualities that should blend and fuse to make a great man, a true leader of the people. After making a reference to Carlyle's views on Heroes and Hero-Worship and Emerson's on 'Great or Representative Men', Ranade developed the theme in his own way. Delivered obviously extempore, the words must have made an immediate and profound impact on his audience, and even now they have lost little of their power:

Truthfulness, great impulses, moral aims, resourcefulness to attain these aims by the bond of love and fellowship—these are the traits of character which go to make a great man . . . You have all read accounts of the life of the Buddha. He had such a hold upon men's minds that wherever he went hundreds and thousands followed him as the Great Teacher so that they ensured the permanent success of the movements which he inaugurated—a most unparalleled success in the world's history. Take again the story of the prophet Mahomed. A poor, illiterate man, he did not dream of religion in his youth, and yet at forty he goes into retirement, incessantly moves about in such a country as Arabia to find that he is persecuted and has to fly for life; but there was such an attraction among men and women towards him that in the course of ten or twenty years he was able to dictate terms to the largest and the most powerful potentates of the day. Here, then, you have a general idea of what constitutes greatness. Eagerness of purpose, sincerity in action, originality, imagination and, above all, the power of magnetism—we might call it vital or spiritual magnetism—these are the qualities which go to make a man great.

Again, in another moment of inspiration, Ranade placed before his countrymen an ideal and an ideal of action:

The true end of our work is to renovate, to purify, and also to perfect the whole man by liberalising his intellect, elevating his standard of duty, and developing to the full all his powers. Till so renovated, purified, and perfected, we can never hope to be what our ancestors once were—a chosen people, to whom great tasks were allotted and by whom great deeds were performed . . . With a liberated manhood, with buoyant hope, with a faith that never shirks duty, with a sense

of justice that deals fairly by all, with unclouded intellect and powers fully cultivated, and, lastly, with a love that overleaps all bounds, renovated India will take her proper rank among the nations of the world and be the master of the situation and of her own destiny. This is the goal to be reached—this is the promised land. Happy are they who see it in distant vision; happier those who are permitted to work and clear the way to it; happiest they who live to see it with their eyes and tread upon the holy soil once more. Famine and pestilence, oppression and sorrow, will then be myths of the past, and the gods will once again descend to the earth and associate with men, as they did in times which we now call mythical.

A good English speech some fifty or more years ago—like Ranade's, for example—attracted only a few hundreds, perhaps a thousand or two; but it was a fit intellectual audience. And the 'earnest' men of those times wrote or spoke out of an innate compulsion, and they had to adjust their sentiments and language to the select audience before them. The fireworks were few and far between, but the speeches were sustained by a steadily warmth. Making a pointed contrast between the Age of Ranade and the Age of Gandhi, the late Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said in 1939:

...if the India of Ranade was less agitated, it was more honest and...if it was less expectant, it was more enlightened. The Age of Ranade was an age in which men and women did engage themselves seriously in studying and examining the facts of their life, and what is more important is that in the face of the opposition of the orthodox mass they tried to mould their lives and their character in accordance with the light they found as a result of their research.

In the Age of Ranade there was not the same divorce between a politician and a student which one sees in the Gandhi Age. In the Age of Ranade a politician who was not a student was treated as an intolerable nuisance, if not a danger. In the Age of Mr. Gandhi learning, if it is not despised, is certainly not deemed to be a necessary qualification of a politician.

After independence, which has given us a mob of ministers and rabble of 'leaders' suffering from the twin diseases of locomotion and loquacity, language has suffered further debasement and dilution, and this applies as much—if not more—to the regional languages as to English. George Orwell has remarked that "political language—and with reservations it is true of all

political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind”. And J. K. Galbraith has referred to the phenomenon of ‘wordfact’, the political wind that is usually made to pass for the reality of flesh and blood. Students in schools and colleges today have perforce to listen to endless imprecise chatter on Planning and the Plans, on Socialism and Socialisation, by the itinerant ministers (State and Union) and hordes of other men dressed in brief authority, and no wonder clarity and correctness of expression, tightness of structure and relevance and fullness of matter, have all fallen into desuetude. But only a couple of generations ago, young men in colleges and boys in schools could still look up to models of public speaking that feasted the mind as well as the ear—for example, the speeches of Ranade and Telang, of Surendranath Banerjea and Rash Behari Ghose, of Tilak and Sri Aurobindo, of Gokhale and Srinivasa Sastri. In the Gandhian Age, leaders like Rajaji, Sardar Patel and Gandhiji himself wedded simplicity to forcefulness, while the Nehrus (father and son), Bhulabhai Desai and Shyamaprasad Mukherjee were capable of sustained flights of eloquence. Only today scholarship, grace, precision, sincerity, logic, moral and spiritual intensity have all become rare (only rare, but not altogether non-existent)—as rare as a man with a mission and a sense of dedication.

To return to the Age of Ranade, the great men of the time believed in the importance of taking themselves and their work seriously. Among those rather closely associated with Ranade was Narayan Chandavarkar and he too—like many of his contemporaries—drew upon the *philosophia perennis* of the Hindus to leaven his political and social thought. In his inaugural address to the Indian National Social Conference of 1905, for instance, he based his whole appeal for social justice on the cardinal spiritual philosophy of India:

What, then, was the central idea round which the machinery of Society was made to move by the Rishis of old? In the mass of the detailed performance of duties prescribed for the individual, one idea stands out most prominently, viz., that he was to pray, to yearn, and to seek for ‘Light’. The Gayatri, which the individual was to utter with unerring regularity morning and evening, is no more and no less

than the cry of the human soul for Light. It is an appeal to God that His Light may be shed on the mind of the individual to illuminate it... This was the central idea and ideal of ancient Hindu life, the pivot round which Society was enjoined to move. 'We were children of Light'. And what did this national yearning for Light, prescribed in the best of our prayers, solemnised in one symbolic worship and idealised in spirit of grace and grandeur by the sweetest of our prophets and poets, mean? For what did it stand? It stood as a lesson to us—a lesson to sink into our hearts and animate our lives—that we should always move with the times by means of the light of knowledge acquired, experiences gained, and events revealed,—that we should ever move forward, instead of standing still. It stood for the light of the seer, the insight of the sage and the foresight of the statesman. Are we children of Light now? Institutions and customs, good enough perhaps for the times for which they were devised, intended to meet the wants, the necessities and surrounding circumstances of a particular age... have exalted themselves at the sacrifice of their ends; and the central ideal of the people, the yearning for light which discovers a new age, new necessities, new aspirations, has been obscured by the ideal of blind usage and customs, with the result that we have become seekers after the very darkness which we are taught by the Rishis to avoid...

Sanatana Dharma shouldn't suicidally constrict itself into a catalogue of prohibitions that had no relevance—that were, in fact, obnoxious—to the hard actualities of the modern age. Chandavarkar claimed that the movement of social reform flowed from the true spirit of Sanatana Dharma which only exhorted people to be 'children of Light'. Leaders like Ranade and Chandavarkar didn't work in compartments, but being themselves integrated men, they were able to give the right lead to the people.

Unlike Ranade and Chandavarkar who were among the exponents of political liberalism, Bepin Chandra Pal leapt to sudden fame during the days of the 'Partition of Bengal' and *Bandemataram* agitation as one of the hotgospellers of the new creed of extremism. Of his political oratory, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri wrote:

For several days on the sands of the (Madras) beach he spoke words hot with emotion and subtly logical, which were wafted by the soft evening breeze to tens of thousands of listeners, invading their whole souls and setting them aflame with the fever of a wild consuming desire. Oratory had never dreamt of such triumphs in

India; the power of the spoken word had never been demonstrated on such a scale. The immediate effect was to deepen and strengthen the discontent already in existence, and to embitter a hundred-fold the controversies that divided the two political schools.

But the same Bepin Pal could also discourse—on Janmashtami Day—on the personality and message of Sri Krishna, the Bhagavan of the *Gita*:

. . . the wonderful catholicity of his ideals and preachings! He is, if he is anything, a Prophet of Reconciliation. There is one Krishna, the pupil of Angirasa, whose name occurs in the Vedas, and is evidently some great non-Aryan hero and teacher, whom the Aryan culture of the early colonisers of India must have gradually assimilated and appropriated to themselves. And this Vedic Krishna was in some form or other an instrument, whether active or passive, for uniting and harmonising the two conflicting ethnic cultures that came face to face in this country with the earliest migrations here. In the *Mahabharata*, a careful historical criticism . . . will possibly reveal, not a family quarrel, but the story of some great tribal conflicts—Sri Krishna appears again as a friend and adviser of the various conflicting parties—one whom every one claimed for his own, and to whom every one appealed for help, and guidance. In the *Gita*, the one book which sums up, more than any others, his highest teachings, he stands, as is universally acknowledged, as the Prophet of Harmony and Reconciliation. And as such, Sri Krishna has a message of the profoundest value and significance to us of the present day . . . India, torn by a thousand dissenting creeds, distracted by the appeals of a hundred conflicting cultures, divided by caste, race and religion, cries out in the deep agony of heart for some great Reconciler and Unifier. . .

The fiery revolutionary, the ardent *bhakta* and the patriot anxious for national unity were one and the same person. In his later life, however, Bepil Pal retreated into obscurity, for he couldn't come to terms with the Gandhian era.

If there was a movement in the latter half of the 19th century from the Age of Innocence towards the Age of Experience, the pace of disenchantment began to quicken from 1905 onwards; and the well-meaning but imperious, impetuous and unimaginative Lord Curzon was largely responsible for this spurt of violent change in attitude. Many raised their voices against Curzon, and one of the earliest to do so was the lawyer, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, who was to preside over the abortive Surat Congress

in 1907. In a speech at a public meeting on 10 March 1905, he made a seasoned indictment of Curzon's policies, with particular reference to his offensive Convocation Address at Calcutta a month earlier:

One of the greatest political figures in England said on a memorable occasion that he did not know how to frame an indictment against a whole nation; but Lord Curzon, dressed in the Chancellor's robe and a little brief authority, was able to frame an indictment, not only against the people of India, but also against all the various nations of Asia—Asia which gave to the world Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ and Muhammad, who may not have taught men how to rule, but who certainly taught them how to live and how to die . . .

This is part of the exordium, but the peroration is equally effective—the sting being reserved for the very last sentence:

. . . if in spite of my best endeavours . . . I have done any injustice to his lordship, I can only console myself with the reflection that there are some infirmities from which the average man cannot altogether free himself. "The contemporaries of superior men", says Goethe, "may easily go wrong about them. Peculiarity discomposes them; the swift current of life disturbs their points of view and prevents them from understanding and appreciating such men". And Lord Curzon, we all know, is a superior person.

Towards the close of the year, the great Gopal Krishna Gokhale presided over the Congress at Banaras. Gokhale belonged to a generation for whom life was a serious business. A political career meant arduous intellectual preparation. Slogans, mass frenzy, frothy emotionalism, cheap rhetoric, these Ranade, Pherozeshah Mehta, Gokhale and their compeers did not know and would not have approved. "In those days", as C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar has remarked, "the first sod had to be turned, the roads had to be formed. The bits of granite were sharp and numerous. The cementing was not there". In 1892, when Gokhale was thirty-two years old and had already tasted a little of the wine of success as also the cup of bitterness, he solemnly resolved as follows:

By the grace of Sree Guru Dattatreya, I will endeavour humbly but firmly to acquire or achieve the following:

1. I will practise Yoga regularly.
2. I will acquire a good knowledge of (a) History—Ancient and Modern; (b) Philosophy—Ancient and Modern; (c) Astronomy; (d) Geology; (e) Physiology; (f) Psychology (now, no more “ology”); (g) French.
3. I will try to become a member of (a) The Bombay Legislative Council; (b) The Supreme Legislative Council; (c) The British Parliament. (In all these assemblies I will try to do good to my country by all means in my power.)
4. I will try to become a preacher of the highest philosophical religion and I will preach this religion to the whole world.

What is surprising is that Gokhale did in fact keep pace with this amazing schedule of work till death put an abrupt end to his ceaseless endeavours. It was the accident of death at the age of forty-nine, and not the Gargantuan regimen itself, that defeated Gokhale. And yet, as V. S. Srinivasa Sastri has said, had not Gokhale achieved at forty-nine “a great deal more than what others when they are seventy can claim to their credit?”

Commitment and orderliness were the marks of Gokhale's life and public career, and he was terribly suspicious of vehemence and passion. With due deliberation he had consecrated his life to the manifold service of his country, and there was also an element of the saint in him which tempered his outlook, his actions and even his speech. His masters were Ranade, Dadabhai, Joshi (the economist) and Pherozeshah Mehta, who were (in Sastri's words) “wise and great men, who knew affairs, knew how to handle them, could predict what could happen from what events and could really guide a nation along safe and hopeful lines”. Sastri became Gokhale's chief disciple and heir, and Gandhiji too acknowledged Gokhale as his own ‘political Guru’. Gokhale thus occupied a unique, almost a central place in the grand scroll of India's statesmen and nation-builders. During the greater part of his life, his main income was Rs. 75 per month as a member of the Deccan Education Society and as professor at the Fergusson College. In 1902, when he was still under forty, he decided to retire on the permissible pension of Rs. 30 per month, not because Delhi beckoned him with a four-figure salary, but because he wished to devote himself entirely to public service. His farewell speech

at the Fergusson College may be cited as a splendid example of the 'other harmony' of prose:

All parting in life is sad, but where the heart's deepest feelings are involved, the severance of old ties, and the necessity of saying good-bye, is about as trying an ordeal as any that a man may be called upon to go through. For eighteen years now, I have tried, according to the humble measure of my capacity, to give the best that was in me to this Society. Through good report and through evil report, through sunshine and through storm, it has been my endeavour to work for this institution with a single aim to its welfare, till at last it has become impossible for me to think of myself as apart from this College. And now, when the time for my withdrawing myself from all active work in this institution has come, my heart is naturally stirred by conflicting emotions, in which a feeling of intense thankfulness is mingled with a feeling of deep sadness. I feel thankful, profoundly thankful, that it has pleased Providence to give it to me to discharge the solemn and onerous obligations of a vow taken so many years ago under the influence of youthful enthusiasm, and that no matter what happens to me in the future, I shall always be able to look back with pleasure and pride on this part of my career, and say to myself: 'Thank God, I was permitted to fulfil my pledge'. But, gentlemen, side by side with this feeling of thankfulness, there is a feeling of deep regret that my active work for this great institution is now at an end . . .

Years ago I remember to have read the story of a man who lived by the side of the sea, who had a nice cottage and fields that yielded him their abundance, and who was surrounded by a loving family. The world thought that he was very happy. But to him the sea had a strange fascination. When it lay gently, heaving like an infant asleep, it appealed to him; when it raged like an angry and roaring lion, it still appealed to him; till at last he could withstand the fatal fascination no longer. And so having disposed of everything and put his all into a boat, he launched it on the bottom of the sea. Twice was he beaten back by the waves, a warning he would not heed. He made a third attempt when the pitiless sea overwhelmed him. To a certain extent this seems to be my position today. . . .

Public life in this country has few rewards and many trials and discouragements. The prospect of work to be done is vast, and no one can say what is on the other side—how all this work may end. But one thing is clear. Those who feel in this matter as I do must devote themselves to the work in a spirit of hope and faith and seek only the satisfaction which comes of all disinterested actions . . .

Thought here glows with emotion, exultation rubs shoulders with wistfulness, the invasion of parable and poetry gives an

additional dimension to the reign of prose. In his Congress presidential address, delivered three years later, there is the same tone of high seriousness and there is the same consummate mastery of language. The passage on Lord Curzon is finely pointed, almost a definitive verdict on his administration:

Gentlemen, how true it is that to everything there is an end! Thus even the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon has come to a close! For seven long years all eyes had constantly to turn to one masterful figure in the land—now in admiration, now in astonishment, more often in anger and in pain, till at last it has become difficult to realise that a change has really come. For a parallel to such an administration, we must, I think, go back to the times of Aurangzeb in the history of our own country. There we find the same attempt at a rule excessively centralized and intensely personal, the same persistence in a policy of distrust and repression, resulting in bitter exasperation all round . . . His (Curzon's) wonderful intellectual gifts, his brilliant powers of expression, his phenomenal energy, his boundless enthusiasm for work—these will ever be a theme of just and unstinted praise. But the gods are jealous, and amidst such lavish endowments, they withheld from him a sympathetic imagination without which no man can ever understand an alien people . . .

Referring to the partition of Bengal, Gokhale said:

The scheme of partition, concocted in the dark and carried out in the face of the fiercest opposition that any Government measure has encountered during the last half a century, will always stand as a complete illustration of the worst features of the present system of bureaucratic rule—its utter contempt for public opinion, its arrogant pretensions to superior wisdom, its reckless disregard of the most cherished feelings of the people, the mockery an appeal to its sense of justice becomes and its cool preference of Service interests to those of the governed.

As regards the appointment of the new Secretary of State for India, John Morley, Gokhale said, towards the end of his long address, that the heart hoped yet trembled "as it had never hoped or trembled before":

He, the reverend student of Burke, the disciple of Mill, the friend and biographer of Gladstone—will he courageously apply their principles and his own to the government of the country, or will he too succumb to the influences of the India Office around him, and thus cast a

cruel blight on hopes, which his own writings have done so much to foster? We shall see . . .

Again, Gokhale's masterly budget speeches in the Imperial Legislative Council were sustained pieces of pleading, and after hearing the 1906 speech, the new Viceroy, Lord Minto, is said to have remarked that even in England there were very few on the front benches capable of such a feat of parliamentary advocacy. And Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson seems to have described a budget debate without Gokhale's participation in it as the play *Hamlet* with the Prince of Denmark left out!

Of the great leaders of the pre-Gandhi age, none stands higher than Gokhale's elder contemporary and political rival, Bal Gangadhar Tilak—better known as the 'Lokamanya'. He was for the masses the 'King of Poona', *Aj Poona-ka-Raja*. It was Sir Valentine Chirol, then closely associated with the *Times* of London, who described Tilak as the Father of Indian Unrest. The phrase succinctly sums up the singular quality of Tilak's political genius—though, of course, in a sense which Chirol didn't mean! It was Tilak who threw the Indian people out of their lethargy and slothful acceptance of foreign rule; it was he who held before them the hopes of a bright future far greater than the yesterdays that had gone before; and it was he who by his idealism, organising genius and phenomenal sacrifices made the realisation of this hope possible. The Time Spirit had to bring such a man as Lokamanya Tilak to the forefront of Indian public life to accomplish ultimately the liberation of India from political subjection. Nor was Tilak a mere demagogue or agitator. He was a mathematician, a scholar and a researcher who has given us books like *Orion: Studies in the Antiquity of the Vedas*, *The Arctic Home of the Vedas* and *Gita Rahasya* (originally in Marathi). While he was certainly a democrat moving with the common people as among equals, he couldn't pander to popular prejudices nor solicit their cheap applause. He was not a revolutionary either, intent merely to destroy; rather did he wish to build the future on the foundations of the past where such could be found. Again, although he had ideals, Tilak was no impractical idealist; he had a shrewdness of judgement which was the despair and admira-

tion of his opponents. As a speaker, he was doubtless more at home in his own Marathi than in English; but in either language his speeches were (to quote Sri Aurobindo), "like the featureless Brahman, self-luminous. Straightforward, lucid, never turning aside from the point which they meant to hammer in or wrapping it up in ornamental verbiage, they read like a series of self-evident propositions". When he said *Swaraj is my birth-right*, it became the basic *sutra* of the nationalistic creed and went into universal currency like the *mantra* 'Bandemataram!' In 1908, after the Surat split between the Moderates and the Extremists, Government took fright. 'Extremism' was obviously 'miching mallecho', and Tilak clearly meant mischief. Had he not declared that "the boycott" was a "substitute for war"? The Muzzaferpore bomb outrage clinched the issue. Sri Aurobindo was arrested, and after a protracted but sensational trial acquitted without a stain on his honour. Tilak too was arrested on 13 July 1908, and the great State trial began. The jury consisted of seven Englishmen and two Indians, and from the beginning there was no concession to public opinion, no attempt at judicial fairness or impartiality. Although in an earlier trial M. A. Jinnah had ably defended Tilak, this time he decided to defend himself. His classic defence speech (in English) lasted 21 hours—truly a record of endurance. But Government had decided to crush the spirit of Tilak, not realising that the spirit of liberty can never really be crushed. The jury returned a majority verdict of 'guilty', the seven Englishmen against the two Indians who dared to feel that Tilak was *not* guilty. Judge Davar, playing Pilate with a vengeance, sentenced the Lokamanya—Tilak Bhagvan, as he was to millions of his countrymen—to six years' transportation and a heavy fine. Tilak accepted the verdict with dignified disdain: "There are higher powers", he declared, "that rule the destiny of things, and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free". Not only most Indians but even many Englishmen were shocked by the atrocious sentence passed on Tilak—virtually, so it seemed at the time, a death sentence. The Socialist leader, H. M. Hyndman, branded the British ruling class as a vile set of ruffians and added that "the conviction of the noble patriot

and martyr, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, was as gross a miscarriage of justice as has ever been known, even under the carpet-beggar despotism in India". On his part, Tilak survived the sentence, survived the heat of Mandalay (in Burma), the loneliness, the total isolation; he survived even the shock of his wife's death. A true Karmayogin, he wouldn't wince in the hour of tribulation. On the other hand, by keeping Tilak at Mandalay for six gruelling years, the bureaucracy only spelt unknowingly the doom of the British Empire. Henceforth, Britishers and Indians were torn far apart, and 15 August 1947 was but the formal concluding of a conclusion that had already been decreed decades earlier.

Returning from Mandalay after serving his sentence, Tilak threw himself into the task of forging a united Congress, lent his whole strength to the Home Rule movement, and hammered out with M. A. Jinnah's cooperation the Hindu-Muslim entente. He made fruitful contacts with E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, who found in Tilak "the biggest leader in India". In 1916, while on his way to England with the deputation that was to present India's case for self-government before the British authorities, he spoke extempore at a reception in Madras. It was a brief address but very much to the point, and well illustrates the qualities of Tilak as a speaker in English:

No one now requires to be told what Home Rule means . . . it is no longer seditious to say that we want Home Rule, and that Home Rule is our birthright. We are going to England to tell the British democracy plainly that the question as to what the first step should be, and what the time for granting full responsible government should be, is no longer a question on which bureaucratic opinion can be tolerated for a moment. We do not want the British democracy to decide how they should act as an umpire between the bureaucracy and ourselves. We are going to England for the purpose of convincing the British democracy that the grant of responsible government to India is the necessity of the hour. It is no longer a question of benevolent generosity or favour. That was, perhaps, the position ten years ago. Now the position is entirely changed. Responsible government to India has now become the necessity of the hour, the necessity of the Empire, and—may I say—the safety of the Empire.

This is, on the whole, on a subdued key, but it reveals clearly

enough the steely strength of his personality; the style is the man! His disciple and colleague and biographer, N. C. Kelkar, has thus admirably summed up Tilak's powers of oratory: "Never a master of the subtle graces of the art of eloquence, 'his strength lay in subject-matter and argument. And on occasions his vehemence swept the field like a wild hurricane or slashing sleet". The tribute is entirely just.

Kelkar himself was a writer and speaker of considerable distinction, and published several books in Marathi as well as English, among the latter being *Landmarks of Lokamanya's Life* and *Pleasures and Privileges of the Pen* (1929). Today there is a great deal of acrimonious discussion regarding the medium of instruction in the university. Should it continue to be English or should we "switch over" to the regional language? Curiously enough, Kelkar spoke on this subject sixty years ago (25 October 1909):

I think I yield to none here in my admiration and appreciation of the English language and literature. And I think that we in India as a nation must be eternally grateful to the English language for opening to us endless vistas and beautiful avenues of Western thought, and what is perhaps of still greater importance, viz. the priceless store of national and political literature which has entirely revolutionised the aspect of things about the Indian ideals and Indian modes of thought. But though I think so highly of English as a second language, I dislike it as if it were my enemy when that language seeks to take the place of my mother-tongue and forces my thinking to be done, not in Marathi, but in English . . . I like English thoughts and ideas; but I like them only in so far as I can call them and make them my own. And mental assimilation is the only thing that can enable me to make them mine . . . if I take them without assimilation, they remain in me as a foreign body and, like a spear-point imbedded in the flesh, they inflame the region around them and make me uncomfortable and unhappy. But when you or I think in the Marathi language, then any other foreign thought or idea we take in has to run the gauntlet of the Marathi sentinel that is posted at the turnpike at every corner; and when an idea, however foreign or heterogeneous, submits itself during its journey to our mind to the vernacular phrase, vernacular idiom, vernacular grammar and vernacular syntax, then it loses nearly all its foreign character and we are able to call it and use it as our own.

The case for what might be called a sensible two-language formula (regional language *plus* English) is stated here with vigour and

psychological plausibility. English has served us well, but it should continue to enrich the 'vernacular' (now we use the term 'regional language'), make it *new*, and not bring about its enfeeblement. Sixty years later, the issue is not settled yet, and the problem has been further complicated by the plea that Hindi should be the sole 'official' or 'link' language.

Madan Mohan Malaviya and Motilal Nehru, both from Allahabad, were contemporaries, and both played prominent parts in our national life. Malaviya was associated with both the Congress and the Hindu Maha Sabha, and he was also the architect of the Banaras Hindu University. He was a learned and serious and rather long-winded speaker, while Motilal Nehru—as leader of the Swaraj Party in the Central Legislative Assembly—had a reputation for debating skill of a high order. M. A. Jinnah was at least his equal in debate, and in the nineteen twenties and thirties the Central Legislatures (the Assembly and the Council of State) had many distinguished parliamentarians. Besides Malaviya and Motilal, there were V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar. N. C. Kelkar and S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Bhulabhai Desai and Satyamurti. The provincial legislatures had their masters of debate too (Rajaji in Madras, Govind Vallabh Pant in Lucknow, K. M. Munshi in Bombay), but the best talent was ordinarily drawn to Delhi.

Since the Surat split of 1907, the two wings of the Congress—the Moderates led by Gokhale and the Extremists led by Tilak (till his arrest, trial and deportation to Mandalay)—had been wrenched apart. The Extremists had to be quiescent for a time, for their leaders were in prison or had preferred to retire. Gokhale died in 1915, and after Tilak's return to India, there was some rapprochement between the two wings, and there was also an understanding between the Congress and the Muslim League. Mrs. Besant's Home Rule Movement too had served to some extent as a solvent of Moderate-Extremist differences. The announcement of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, however, once again threatened to divide the Congress. Gandhiji had in the meantime appeared on the scene, and was talking an active part in politics. Should the Reforms be accepted and worked—though they fell short of expec-

tations—or should they be rejected? Although disappointed, Tilak still pleaded for responsive cooperation. But the Jallian-walla Bagh massacre and subsequent events made Gandhiji announce that “cooperation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful”. Tilak’s death on 31 July 1920 left the field clear for Gandhiji’s leadership, which also meant the final breaking away from the Congress of many seasoned leaders like M. A. Jinnah and V. S. Srinivasa Sastri.

In 1909, Malaviya could say: “I do believe that British rule is meant for the good of India, meant to help us to raise our country once more to a position of prosperity and power”. In 1916, Tilak could still hope that the British would accept the Congress-League scheme of self-government for India, and even in 1917, Motilal Nehru could speak guardedly, using the language of sweet reasonableness:

We claim to be reasonable men, and as such we have, through our great national institutions, submitted a scheme of reforms to which we consider we are entitled as a first instalment towards the grant of all responsible self-government in due course. What we have asked for is, to our minds, the irreducible minimum of real power which ought to be invested in us. But we grant that we are not infallible. We are open to conviction and are prepared to negotiate on the basis of our scheme . . .

But two years later, Lajpat Rai had no use for the Moderates, and furiously lashed at them:

Some of them have been armchair politicians, writing mostly for profit and gain, occasionally giving a tiny fraction of their income in subscriptions; or practising law and making millions . . . Between them and the masses there is a gulf which they have never tried to bridge. They live in palaces, while the masses have not even huts to live in. Most of them are Sirs, or Rai Bahadurs, or Khan Bahadurs. They are proud of these titles . . . Too much authority, blind authority, mere authority, —whether that of the prince or the priest, of the Raja or the Nabob, of the oligarch or the official, or the wealthy and the prosperous,—is the bane of Indian life; yet these stalwarts of reform always take shelter behind big names. Their chief argument is to be found in *Who’s Who*, and if the people who are with them are so many Sirs, so many Honourables, so many Rajas and Nabobs, their arguments are conclusive . . . Their opponents they run down as ‘youngsters’, ‘demagogues’ ‘inexperienced’, ‘rash’, ‘firebrands’, and so on. The people they call

'mobocracy'. Anything disagreeable to them is immoral. Anything distasteful to them is gross stupidity . . . In a minority, they desire to rule the majority, even more autocratically than they did when they had a majority.

He also said that, between the ultra-Moderates and the ultra-Extremists, "the man who is after our own heart, though we do not always agree with him in politics, is Gandhi". Well, here we have the beginnings of the Age of Gandhi, and henceforth the very style of oratory was to change greatly.

But even in the Age of Gandhi, flights of oratory reminiscent of the style of an earlier day were not altogether uncommon. Chittaranjan Das, for example, made this grand sweeping summary of Indian history in the course of his presidential address at Gaya:

Throughout the pages of Indian history, I find a great purpose unfolding itself. Movement after movement has swept over this vast country, apparently creating hostile forces, but in reality stimulating the vitality and moulding the life of the whole into one great nationality. If the Aryans and the non-Aryans met, it was for the purpose of making one people out of them. Brahmanism with its great culture succeeded in binding the whole of India and was indeed a mighty unifying force. Buddhism with its protest against Brahmanism served the same great historical purpose; and from Magadha to Taxila was one great Buddhist Empire which succeeded, not only in broadening the basis of Indian unity, but in creating, what is perhaps not less important, the greater India beyond the Himalayas and beyond the seas, so much so that the sacred city where we have met may be regarded as a place of pilgrimage of millions and millions of people of Asiatic races. Then came the Mahomedans of diverse races but, with one culture which was their common heritage. For a time it looked as if here was a disintegrating force, an enemy to the growth of Indian nationalism, but the Mahomedans made their home in India, and, while they brought a new outlook and a wonderful vitality to the Indian life, with infinite wisdom they did as little as possible to disturb the growth of life in the villages where India really lives. This new outlook was necessary for India; and if the two sister streams met, it was only to fulfil themselves and face the destiny of Indian history. Then came the English with their alien culture, their foreign methods, delivering a rude shock to this growing nationality; but the shock has only completed the unifying process so that the purpose of history is practically fulfilled. The great Indian nationality is in sight.

This might look like an exercise in over-simplification, but one should remember that C. R. Das was making a political speech,

trying to read in the panoramic expanse of Indian history the grounds of hope for forging a united nationalist India. In the addresses of most political leaders during the last half a century or more, the one continuing concern has been 'unity'— and this concern was even more deeply and sincerely felt in pre-independence days than after the transfer of power to partitioned India and Pakistan. On the one hand there was the ugly fact of alien rule and bureaucratic despotism. It was clear that unless the people were united they would be unable to wrest freedom from the British. On the other hand, the prevalence of communal and caste divisions, of economic disparities and political rivalries, made such united endeavour on the issue of *swaraj* or independence practically impossible. Hence almost every leader ritually expatiated on the need for unity and the way to unity. There was, again, the question of leadership, individual responsibility and collective discipline. Was 'leadership' in a vast country like India to develop into a monolithic phenomenon? Wasn't there need for a "linked leadership" that ranged all the way from the village to the District Headquarters, and so on to the provincial capital and the national capital? Some of these points were touched by S. Srinivasa Iyengar in his Congress presidential address at Gauhati in 1926:

Let us not forget, in the fever of political controversy, that the strength of each religion is derived from God and is rooted in the souls of Prahladas. Not all the tortures of a Torquemada nor all the burning at the stakes nor all other forms of persecution have been able to destroy the mystic quality of the human soul. Neither Hinduism nor Islam derives or requires strength either from the present or from any future government. Both stand far, far above *Swaraj*. . . .

It appears to me that the vision of *Swaraj* has become somewhat dim in the dust of internal strife and our hunger for it less keen in our greater desire for individualism. The need of the hour is not philosophy but action, not freedom for the individual but freedom for the nation, not alone unity in ideal and object, but also unity in method and action, direction and pace, and above all, not polemics and projects but organisation and discipline, first and last and right through . . . Should we have distinct parties in the country or in the Congress? . . . The answer comes again and again from the depths of our being, from the holy of holies, from our tortured soul, that the righteous should link hands against the unrighteous. There can be only two parties in India, the party of the Government and its adherents that obstruct *Swaraj*, and

the party that fights visibly and unceasingly for Swaraj. An army has several arms, but it would be a singular army indeed if its cavalry fought its infantry and its artillery opened fire on both . . .

I deprecate the philosophy of individualism in a supreme struggle for freedom . . . On a point of religion, of morality, of honour, one's own conscience must be the arbiter, but in transacting the affairs of a country, when a decision is not irreligious, immoral or dishonourable, I fail to see how we may rely on our right to differ from one another and yet uphold the discipline necessary for an organisation fighting for Swaraj. If the soldiers in any army claim similar right when engaged in a battle, they will have short shrift at the enemy's hands.

Two years later, Motilal Nehru again stressed the need for unity at the Calcutta Congress, for the organisation was then sharply divided on the question of the national goal—was it to be Dominion Status or Complete Independence? Next year, at Lahore, Jawaharlal concluded his address with *Inqilab Zindabad!* Henceforth Congress oratory was generally inclined to be more passionate than persuasive, though of course stalwarts like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Acharya Kripalani, and Subhas Chandra Bose could still inject their own pronounced individuality into their presidential addresses and touch them with much more than mere ephemeral importance.

Of the principal Congress leaders of the Gandhian era, only Rajaji (C. Rajagopalachari) didn't become President of the organisation, but he has been for five or six decades an indefatigable speaker and writer. In the early twenties, he edited *Young India* when Gandhiji was in prison, and since the sixties he has been associated with *Swarajya*, the mouthpiece of the Swatantra Party which he found to oppose the Statist policies of the Congress. Age has not blunted the keenness of his intellect, nor dulled the edge of his patriotism or his profound concern for the future of the human race caught in the narrows of the Big Powers' nuclear armament race. Released from the burden of office, released too from the inhibitions of narrow political affiliations, Rajaji's mind has acquired the global sweep of the true elder statesman. No problem is too big or too complicated, no circumstance concerning the future of Homo Sapiens is too local or too trivial, to engage Rajaji's attention. At no time of his enormous career spread over 60 years had

there been any doubt regarding the penetrating quality of his intellect, the white-heat intensity of his idealism, or the snow-white purity of his personal life. With age, however, has come a marvellous mellowing as well, the intellect has readily opened itself to the government of the heart and the soul, and the politician, the administrator and the leader of men is now exceeded by the moralist, the humanist and the man of God—the Sage who bears bold witness to the categorical imperatives and ineffable realities in the world of the Spirit. He has been a fighter and campaigner all his life, but always the fabulist and parable-maker has worked hand-in-glove with the crusader and the arch-evangelist of peace. How pregnant, how charged with the dance of life, are his pointed and almost jewelled utterances, scattered in his speeches, writings and conversations:

Let not tools take possession of our souls; let us be in command over our souls.

Let us look back a little while we march forward and let us weigh ourselves by history, rather than by wishes.

Morality without religion is like calories without vitamins; it may do some good, particularly in cutting out fanaticism, but it will not build the inner strength which comes from the practice of good conduct which boys and girls are taught to perform as part of their homage to a Supreme Being.

Conferences speak only once, but literature speaks many times.

There are two ways of deception: one is by simple deception, and the other is by compromise.

Do you know that it needs three things to make a truly great man? . . . First, a man's brain. And a woman's heart. And a child's temperament—a child's freshness of outlook.

For years Rajaji had no Party behind him; even today, he has only a Party without power. He has not been moved by the spur of personal ambition. Never in very robust health, and now on account of age, he has not been sustained by the flow of abundant energy. The power that he can still summon at need can only be called a form of spiritual power, and we see it taking shape as the shining winged word. John Gunther once called Rajaji the 'Brahmin Savanarola'; others have described him as the Ulysses of the freedom army, wise and long-suffering and incredibly resourceful; still others have compared him with ascetic statemen like Kautilya and Vidyaranya; and it was

Alan-Campbell-Johnson who found Rajaji "exercising immense moral authority . . . without any outward gesture".

As thinker, speaker and writer, Rajaji has been a great power for good because he has his roots in our immemorial tradition, and he has tuned up his life to the music of the classics of India and the world—the Upanishads, the *Gita*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Kural* of Tiruvalluvar, the Bible, Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Shakespeare, and the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa—and he has popularised as a labour of love some of these imperishable spiritual testaments in the intellectual idiom of the present day. The English condensed prose renderings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (albeit translated from his own original Tamil versions) have enjoyed a great vogue in the country, and the two volumes of *Satyameva Jayate* (1961) contain some of the most significant political literature of our time. His speeches too have been collected and cover a wide range in subject-matter. As R. P. Masani wrote in his Foreword, "whatever may be the subject-matter of the discourse, social, religious, educational or political, Rajaji invests it with a philosophical and spiritual significance. It is this combination of the idealism of the rishis with the wisdom of a realist in Rajaji's treatment of ordinary incidents and problems of life that lends a peculiar charm and value to his speeches". His speech on 'Nuclear Weapons' for example, is a masterly piece of pleading on behalf of world health, for it is increasingly being endangered by the atomic test explosions. He concludes his Patna University lecture on 'A Religion for Modern Times' with this admirably lucid summing-up:

. . . religions that contradict the conclusions of science cannot but degenerate into formalism and hypocrisy, and Hindu philosophy can claim to be peculiarly in harmony with the latest knowledge. Secondly, if human happiness and progress depend on doing away with selfishness and have to be based on a new economy of social cooperation, Hindu philosophy furnishes a faith and a culture which are peculiarly fitted for such reorganisation and which can support and strengthen the compulsory laws of a democratic State. Thirdly, Hindu philosophy has raised catholicity and tolerance to the level of positive and cardinal religious duty. Hindu philosophy has thus potentialities to make the greatest positive contribution to civilisation. It has no quarrel whatsoever

with the physicist or the geologist, and yet it offers a firm spiritual foundation for a new cooperative and catholic polity for the governance of the world. It is not an opiate but can be a powerful driving force and automatic regulator.

But Rajaji is as much at home commenting on literature as he is when castigating nuclear proliferation or underlining the contemporaneous relevance of Hinduism. Here is a passage from the 'Epilogue' to his version of the *Ramayana*:

Rain falling from the heavens flows into the rivers and flows down to join the sea. Again from the sea the water is sucked up by the sun and rises to the sky, whence it descends again as rain and flows down as rivers. Even so, feelings and values rise from the people and, touching the poet's heart, are transformed into a poem which, in turn, enlightens and inspires the people. Thus in every land the poets and their people continually reinforce each other . . . Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer as one likes. Does a plant spring from the seed or does the seed issue from the plant? Was the bird or the egg the first cause? Did clouds rise from the sea or was the sea filled by the waters in the sky? All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.

It is a homely but wonderfully apt simile to indicate the filiations between life and literature. All men of good will must be engaged in building bridges between the past and the future, but without the historical sense to help us to evaluate the past, without a feeling for science to keep close to reality, and without the seer's vision to help us to look far ahead, we shall be but poor builders, for the building will never be done. Certainly, Rajaji must be classed among the great builders, for his clarity of vision and expression, his unfaltering sense of ends and means, and his profound concern for the total human situation come to us with something akin to redemptive force bringing hope even to a world edging towards the abyss of self-destruction.

Gokhale's disciple and Gandhiji's exact contemporary and highly valued friend, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri was in a class apart. Lord Balfour ranked him among the greatest orators of the century, and the Master of Balliol (A. H. Smith) declared that

he had never realised the beauty of the English language till he heard Sastri. "An artist in words", was Lady Lytton's comment, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* described him as "the greatest Indian orator of his day". Gandhiji's secretary, Mahadev Desai, wrote thus of Sastri:

There are very few men in our public life possessed of his versatility and his wonderful mastery of the English language. Purists there are many, but none who has Sastriar's mastery of the speech and the pen. There are a good many who have his eloquence, but none of them can come near him in his acuteness of perception, wisdom and knowledge of affairs. What Johnson said of Burke may be truly said of Sastriar: 'He is an extraordinary man. His stream of mind is perpetual.'

Sastri was an interested bystander watching with trepidation and anxiety the Gandhian experiments with Truth on the individual and national planes, and didn't hesitate to express his doubts or even his disapproval. At the end of a long and on the whole critical letter written on 16 July 1940, Sastri concluded thus:

I ask forgiveness for the freedom with which I have set forth my views. Like a teacher I have no doubt laboured the obvious. Like an irresponsible critic I have alternately found fault and exhorted. Like an anxious son of India I have perhaps painted a lurid picture and alarmed you unnecessarily. Put down these lapses partly to ignorance and partly to overwrought nerves. You have access to knowledge which is beyond my reach. While you are at the centre and hear the authentic voices, I am far away and hear only faint and distorted echoes . . .

He was an excellent letter-writer, as the collection first published in 1944 showed. Always a polished and persuasive speaker, his speech acquired during his last years a mellowness and an insinuating beauty of its own, and his mind expressed itself in a flow which (in Tagore's language) 'like a stream speaks as it flows'. As he recollected men and events and faded controversies in the comparative quiet of the evening, the inessentials disappeared as a matter of course, the strong lines seemed stronger than ever, and the old values emerged brighter from the ordeal of revaluation; resentment and viperous remorse were no more, and only a feeling of peace and a memory of good men and great strivings remained. Sastri on Gokhale was

always a treat of a high order; and he spoke of Ranade, Dada-bhai Naoroji, Pheroza Shah Mehta, Krishnaswami Aiyar and Mahatma Gandhi with like understanding and sympathy. In the late evening of his life, he was at last persuaded in 1944 to give a course of 30 lectures in the grounds of the Madras Sanskrit College on the *Ramanyaya* of Valmiki. Three years earlier he had written to T. N. Jagadisan from Coimbatore:

I have not touched an English book since coming here. The *Ramayana* is my only study. On that immortal epic one wants to say nothing which is not one's ripest thought. My ideas show yet no sign of having ripened. Not that my mind changes frequently or my appreciation waxes and wanes. But I seem to shrink from final judgement, like a man who beholds a vast panorama and is dazed, being unable to seize the ensemble in one view, where each detail holds him under a spell . . . Curious sense one has of propriety. On other topics one is not held back by such notions of perfection. But on the *Ramayana*, a tentative opinion is blasphemy.

Even on 17 February 1944, he could only speak of having nerved himself up to the task—but political interests had intervened. But the lectures were delivered extempore at long last, and have since been published as a book of about 500 pages. *Lectures on the 'Ramayana'* is undoubtedly the work of a man of fine sensibility who wielded the English language with ease and sureness and utter naturalness, and in the discussion of character-problems the lectures reveal a Bradleyan sweep and subtlety of analysis, and a complete mastery of the material. Only one passage can be given by way of illustration:

One last scene yet, not less tragic than any that has gone before. But it is in its own class. It transcends our experience, it defies our imagination, it leaves us speechless with awe, and with a feeling that we are no longer on earth. You remember how when the little boys Kusa and Lava had been recognised in the king's place, Rama asked to see Sita, and how into his presence Sita is brought by Valmiki himself. And then Rama asks for a *sapatha*, an oath of purity, from Sita before he takes her back. Before the assembled subjects, tributary kings, ministers, merchants from all parts, he asks her to take an oath again that she is pure. Remember Sita was clad in the orange robes of a hermit. You see how her fate pursues her to the bitter end. Must she take an oath again? With downcast eyes and with face of divine resignation,

she said: 'As I have never let my thoughts wander away from Rama, so let my mother Earth give me an opening. I will go back to where I came from. This earth is not for me, nor this husband, nor these subjects whom no proof can ever convince'. Then as she prayed to her mother to allow her to go back to her place of origin, the earth opened, and marvellous to relate, a throne came up, all of gold and diamonds, strong Nagas, five-headed cobras, bearing the *simhasana*. In that *simhasana* there was her mother, who welcomed her, 'My daughter, come back. You have had enough of this earth.'

So let us leave Sita, crowned with these flowers from high heaven, for, mind you, while earth did not understand, did not applaud her peerless character, heaven did. She was saved, but not to Rama her pitiless husband, nor to the subjects who continually suspected her in spite of repeated proofs

Commenting on this superfluously tragic incident, Rajaji hedges uncomfortably and frankly admits that his heart "rebels against it" and hence he puts forward the view that, perhaps, it is meant to mirror "the voiceless and endless suffering of our women-folk"!

Another elder statesman was K. M. Munshi, whose writings in English have on the whole been rather more utilitarian—comprising biography, literary history, essays, lectures, letters—than his outstandingly original creative work in Gujarati. His commitment to the cause of literature and culture is revealed in his *Somnath the Shrine Eternal*, *The Glory of Gurjara Desa* and collections like *Sparks from the Anvil*. His versatility, his curiosity and his rich sensibility, his constant anxiety about the nation's future and his capacity to feel at home and make creative use of any situation, all are evidenced in the variety of his essays and lectures. Scholarship mingles with idealism and practical sagacity in many of his academic discourses, and often the educationist (the creator of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan) and the *rasika* achieve co-existence with the patriot and the administrator. Although he has advocated the study of the mother tongue, and of Sanskrit and Hindi, he is fully aware also of the debt of modern India to English and to the Western culture that we have assimilated through English. He has acknowledged how the Magna Charta has been brought into Indian law in its modern form by British and Indian jurists and legislators and now forms an integral part of our Constitution:

The introduction of English in India was no ordinary event. When English came to us, the world entered a new stage. India joined the brotherhood of the English-speaking world. It led, as I have said, to a cultural upheaval in India, to a wide vision. The barriers of latitude, colour and race were broken down; the East mingled with the West in the sphere of the mind; a great step was taken towards establishing direct human intercourse, and sweeping away national frontiers . . . to-day English is ours, and with its aid we can make ourselves felt more than through any other agency. It would therefore be criminal to ignore or neglect English in this country.

No ambiguity or circumspection here; this is the voice of a statesman who is also an educationist and a man of wide culture.

There was a time when the Vice-Chancellorship of a University was an honorary post, and was usually held by a legal luminary or jurist. The most outstanding of such Vice-Chancellors was Sir Asutosh Mookerjee who, during his long tenure, made Calcutta a modern University, giving a lead to the whole country. When Lord Lytton made the offer of re-appointment subject to certain humiliating conditions, Sir Asutosh declined the offer in a letter (dated 26 March 1923) that has since become a classic. The concluding portion of the letter is worth quoting here:

There are expressions in your letter which imply that I am an applicant for the post and I am in expectation of re-appointment. Let me assure you . . . you are entirely mistaken . . . You are apparently not acquainted with the traditions of the high office which I have held for ten years . . . this high tradition was not created by me. It was my privilege to work as a Member of the Syndicate with eight successive Vice-Chancellors during a period of seventeen years . . . To them it would have been a matter of astonishment to be told that as Vice-Chancellors they were expected to adapt themselves to the views of the Government, simply because it was the Government which had the appointment in its gift . . . I am not surprised that neither you nor your Minister can tolerate me. You assert that you want us to be men. You have one before you, who can speak and act fearlessly according to his convictions, and you are not able to stand the sight of him. It may not be impossible for you to secure the services of a subservient Vice-Chancellor, prepared always to carry out the mandates of your Government, and to act as a spy on the Senate. He may enjoy the confidence of your Government, but he will not certainly enjoy the confidence of the Senate and the public of Bengal. We shall watch with interest the

performances of a Vice-Chancellor of this type, creating a new tradition for the office.

I send you without hesitation the only answer which an honourable man can send—an answer which you and your advisers expect and desire: I decline the insulting offer you have made to me.

That noble breed of Vice-Chancellors—scholar, patriot, educationist, thinker, self-respecting Man—has now become a vanishing species.

Two among the prominent liberals in politics of an earlier day were C. Y. Chintamani, editor of the *Leader* and K. Natarajan, editor of the *Indian Social Reformer*. When the notorious Miss Katherine Mayo published her *Mother India*, ostensibly as an exercise in sanitary hygiene, the book was universally criticised in India, and Gandhiji himself called it “a drain inspector’s report”. Natarajan reviewed the book at some length in his paper, and one small passage may be given here to illustrate the quality of his writing:

While Miss Katherine Mayo in her first chapter affirms that Indians alone can work out their redemption, in the second chapter she maintains that Indians in the nature of things cannot help themselves . . . It is not easy to disentangle Miss Katherine Mayo’s facts from her inferences. Either deliberately or from sheer perversity they constantly get confused with each other. Miss Mayo has no sense of history which she invents to suit her argument as she goes along. Her thoughts, indeed, have no background. She is constantly involving herself and her readers in ‘the fallacy of many questions’, of which the stock example in the text-books is: ‘Have you left off beating your mother?—yes or no?’ . . . It is of such questions that Tennyson wrote the familiar lines:

That a lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies,
That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought outright;
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.

Miss Katherine Mayo’s book is built upon such half-truths.

Mother India provoked numerous rejoinders, the most famous of them being *Uncle Sham* by K. L. Gauba. Natarajan’s son, S. Natarajan, is a fine journalist too, and has inherited his father’s idealism and sense of social commitment.

As a writer, C. Y. Chintamani had a forceful if not elegant style, and his real strength lay in his mastery of his material.

He gave a course of lectures on 'Indian Politics since the Mutiny', and his assessment of Gandhiji is interesting:

Take him all in all, no Indian need hesitate to look upon this great soul as the greatest man on earth today. . . . All this conceded, what is Mr. Gandhi as a politician? It is not given to man to be perfect or infallible. Possibly even divine incarnations are not, when they come to live in this world in human form. Infallibility and perfection are attributes of the Divine. I believe with Lord Acton that absolute devotion to mortal man ought not to exist, and with Mr. Bertrand Russell that it is dangerous to regard any one man as infallible,—I will add, Mr. Gandhi not excepted. . . . My study of Mr. Gandhi has led me to the conclusion that, while he is the greatest man among all who have served India in the political sphere during the last hundred years, he certainly is not one of the wisest political leaders the country has had. When his numerous inconsistencies and serious mistakes as a political leader are considered without partiality or prejudice, I at any rate cannot resist the conclusion that, whatever may be the future effects of his policy, it has done positive harm in the present.

If this is a 'liberal' view, here follows an 'extremist' view by Subhas Chandra Bose who seldom saw eye to eye with Gandhiji and in the end broke away from the Congress, escaped from India during the second world war, and organised the Azad Hind Fauz to effect the liberation of India. Subhas was an intrepid leader, with a great charismatic hold on the people, especially of Bengal. In a speech broadcast from Bangkok on 2 October 1943, he tried to show that the work begun by Gandhiji on non-violent lines should be completed by armed revolution, and tried to reinforce his appeal by a reference to historical precedents:

It is not in India alone that a struggle for freedom has been heralded by a spiritual awakening. In the Risorgimento movement in Italy, it was Mazzini who first gave the spiritual inspiration to the Italian people. He was then followed by the fighter and hero, Garibaldi, who began the March to Rome at the head of one thousand armed volunteers. In modern Ireland, too, the Sinn Fein Party, when it was born in 1906, gave the Irish people a programme which was very much similar to Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation programme of 1920. Ten years after the birth of the Sinn Fein Party—that is, in 1916—the first armed revolution in Ireland took place.

If Gandhiji was India's Mazzini, Subhas cast himself for the role of Garibaldi. Of a very different type was Pattabhi Sitaramayya (who once unsuccessfully contested the Congress presidency with Subhas) who was more of an intellectual. He is the historian of the Indian National Congress, but the record of his life at the Ahmednagar Fort as a political prisoner is given in *Feathers and Stones*, and is full of interesting sketches, anecdotes and reminiscences. This on Mahadev Desai, for instance:

The news of Mahadev's death cast a gloom over us in the Ahmednagar Fort. I was moved to tears myself, and Vallabhbhai was deeply shaken. He fasted for the night as he could not touch food. We then began to recount Mahadev's past. He had qualified for the bar and Vallabhbhai remembers him and Narahari Parikh attending courts and watching while he was himself practising.... With Mahadev's death, should all the material for perhaps twenty volumes relating to modern Indian history perish? His notes may be there, but where is the man who sat with Gandhi in all the interviews with the world's great public characters from King George to Edward Thompson or Louis Fisher, the American correspondent? For every word that Mahadev jotted down, he had a whole chapter of history embedded in the tablets of his memory.

Like many another Congress leader, Sitaramayya too was a journalist for a time when he edited the weekly paper, *Janmabhoomi*.

Although after independence journalism isn't any more the vocation that it was during the days of the freedom struggle, there have been a few notable survivals from the earlier age, and of course among the numerous new arrivals are men of exceptional talent. A journalist like the late Khasa Subba Rau, who founded the *Swatantra* and later the *Swarajya*, was one of those whom nothing could daunt and nothing could corrupt. Of 'Khasa', another distinguished journalist, K. Iswara Dutt, wrote that he served no paper on which he was not "in full possession of his soul. . . . To the scholar's equipment and the craftsman's excellence, he brings the thinker's original approach and the crusader's fiery zeal. There is in his writings that rarest of things — character". His *Men in the Limelight* (1941) is a collection of portraits in miniature, among the best of their

kind. In the days of satyagraha and civil disobedience, he suffered lathi blows and imprisonment, and his readiness to suffer and to sacrifice burned like a brazier till the very end of his life. Iswara Dutt who pursued the profession of journalism as an adventure published *The Street of Ink* (1956), an engaging mixture of autobiography and a history of India's Fourth Estate. Men and situations are summoned back, as if with a magic wand; the epigrams flash, the puns dazzle; and there is also an undercurrent of sadness in this story of the Decline and Fall of the 'Street of Ink'. It projects before us the portrait of an age, a profession, and of a man with striking gifts and a lovable personality. During his last years he was engaged, single-handed, in the publication of a monumental *Congress Cyclopaedia*, one or two volumes of which came out before death cut his life short. There is, then, Pothan Joseph, the Grand Old Man of Indian journalism, who made his 'Over a Cup of Tea' column nationally famous. Another veteran journalist was G. V. Krupanidhi, whom C. R. Reddy called the Bayard of Indian Journalism. Frank Moraes, the editor-in-chief of the *Indian Express*, has brought the graces and distinction of Oxford to Indo-Anglian journalism, and he is also the author of one of the best biographies of Jawaharlal Nehru. *Hitavada's* editor, A. D. Mani, is a trenchant writer and has lately won his spurs as a parliamentarian as well.

All journalism is under the curse of instantaneous death, attracting compelling attention in the morning but forgotten an hour afterwards. There are journalists like M. Chalapathi Rau, S. Mulgaokar, K. Rangaswami, Kuldip Nayar and V. K. Narasimhan, and 'freelances' like A. D. Gorwala and H. V. R. Iengar who are always worth reading, but the interest is short-lived. Editorials are now less long-winded than they used to be, and there is a pointedness and a brevity—even a snappiness and a spiciness—that are rather refreshing. "Journalism embalmed in a book is unreadable", said Virginia Woolf, and as a broad affirmation it is nothing to cavil at—though there are exceptions to this rule, as there are to others. After all, Cobbett and Hazlitt were journalists; so were Stevenson and Beerbohm; and so, in our century, Lytton Strachey, George Orwell and Virginia Woolf herself. The modern age of urban concentra-

tion and mass production is no doubt little conducive to the cultivation of the art of the essay. There has been a steady dilution of quality, a thinness of intellectual and emotional content, a blatant vulgarisation of taste. When one writes for an audience of a hundred thousand or more, when one writes under pressure or in a hurry, one has necessarily to avoid all nuances in thought and expression, and confine oneself to familiar grooves, the stereotyped responses, the stale similitudes. But even in these degenerate days there are papers that manage to retain some individuality and independence. There is, for instance, the *Spectator* or the *New Statesman* of London, and, in India, there is *Swarajya*. Their audience, fit though comparatively few, has a taste for what may often prove caviare to the general. Even so, the brilliance of journalism—of the best journalism—wears off too soon, like scent in the bottle when the cork is removed. "The newspaper crocus", says Mrs. Woolf, "radiates a golden glow . . . it is beautifully finished. . . . But the night comes and these flowers fade". The more's the pity!

In a slim collection, *Excursions*, V. K. Narasimhan put together 22 fugitive pieces garnered from the writings of about 25 years. It is confessedly a miscellany, but there are some good things in it. For example, there are the tributes to the great editors of yesterday: "accuracy of fact and sobriety in comment" were Kasturiranga Iyengar's twin ideals; his son, Kasturi Srinivasan, "was always anxious that the trivial should not be magnified even if occasionally significant news got under-featured"; and 'Khasa' brought to his editorial task "a quality of independence and fearlessness which is unique". As regards the condition of the country, Narasimhan paints a pretty lurid picture and concludes with the remark: "A spiritual catharsis on a national scale must be the prelude to a reordering of the national life". Although the writing is rather bare and unemphatic, it is not weak and there is even a touch of whimsy in pieces like 'Story of Old China'.

Perhaps the most brilliant Indian journalist of our time, M. Chalapathi Rau began as a literary free lance in the early thirties, and what started as a hobby has now become the whole of his life. As editor of the *National Herald*, he was for many years Jawaharlal Nehru's spokesman and keeper of conscience.

As 'Magnus' he is a columnist of versatility and power. In his *Fragments of a Revolution* (1965) are gathered 36 essays of jewelled brevity, and they are quite characteristic of the man and his style. Thus of the Indian bureaucracy:

In recent years, Indian bureaucracy has acquired stability, character, and, of course, obesity. It has its elaborate ritual of red tape; in its fervent moods, it amounts to cabalistic mystery. It is a free masonry of secret codes and sententious memoranda....

And thus of present-day New Delhi the 'New Babylon':

When newspapers present ministers as modern versions of Kubla Khan, secretaries and others must be the happiest men alive. For they have the Good Life in a far greater measure, being accountable neither to Parliament nor to the public; with all their deadly devotion to files and their casual or habitual indulgence in drink, they run the affairs of state lugubriously. They need not resign; they get pensions; and they lose no time in joining firms on fat salaries as soon as they retire.

As for the politicians who are very much in the limelight, they are the new aristocracy:

There are social discrepancies which undermine the pride of intellect. Even the third-rate politician makes greater noise and attracts greater attention than leading scientists or philosophers.... The Indian politician is a semi-intellectual, a man in a hurry with no time to think, but he is a patron of the arts, the writer of prefaces, and the arbiter of academic life.

And here, in a broadcast, we have Chalapathi Rau flaying alive the modern Indian 'socialite':

To most people life is a labyrinth; to the socialite, male and female, it is a staircase for climbing in complicated orbits. It is easy to meet the type, sleek, hearty, hospitable, smelling picnics and fancy dress parades. There he is, puffing, proud of the trophies he has collected, a little satiated with success, yet seeking no respite from recognition. He moves from party to party collecting quips, stories, scandal, contracts.... And there she is, restless, indefatigable, 'helloing' everyone, and displaying platinum from every pore of her vivacious personality. Whether they are existentialists or not, they make no excuses for trying to show that to exist is not enough. New morality is but old morals

served in a new manner. To be somebody is to be somebody else.... They are part of contemporary folklore. You cannot escape them. If you do not recognise them, they will recognise you.... You stop thinking; there is no time to think, and no need to think. They do not. They are in perpetual locomotion.... There let us leave them, male and female, panting again, at the doorsteps of high society.

Orators and journalists are, after all, wedded to the moment almost as a rule, and it is but seldom that what they speak or write rises above the ephemeral and achieves the hall-mark of distinction. Numerous indeed are the tasks on which the 'prosaists' are engaged: there are the historians, the philosophers, the jurists; the biographers, the auto-biographers, the letter writers and the writers of travel-books; the essayists, the critics, and the writers on educational problems; the economists, the political scientists, the sociologists and the anthropologists. Prose writing whose aim is functional or utilitarian could be forbiddingly pedestrian, and like prose writing elsewhere, Indian prose writing too is often clumsy and uncertain, sometimes crude and misbegotten, sometimes terribly mannered and affected, but there have been masters too, or at least writers competent enough to get their ideas across. Of historians, R. C. Dutt, Jadunath Sircar, R. C. Majumdar, K. M. Panikkar, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, Romilla Thapar, Khushwant Singh; of philosophers, Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, M. Hiriyanna, Surendranath Das Gupta, T. M. P. Mahadevan, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Swami Ranganathananda; of jurists, Muthuswami Ayyar, Syed Mahmood, Subramania Ayyar, Dinshaw Mulla, Hari Singh Gour, S. Varadachariar, M. R. Jayakar, K. Subba Rao; of biographers, R. P. Masani (on Dadabhai Naoroji), Homi Modi (on Pherozeshah Mehta), Sastri (on Gokhale), K. R. Kripalani (on Tagore and Gandhi), P. Kodanda Rao (on Sastri), D. V. Tamhankar (on Tilak), Frank Moraes (on Nehru and Purushottam Thakurdas); of autobiographers, Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose (*An Indian Pilgrim*), Prakash Tandon (*Punjabi Century*), Dom Moraes (*My Son's Father*), Kamala Dongerkary (*On the Wings of Time*), Nayantara Sahgal (*From Fear Set Free*) and Sasthi Brata (*My God Died Young*); of letter-writers, Sastri, C. R. Reddy, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhiji, Subhas Bose, M. N. Roy; of essayists,

Nagesh Vishwanath Pai, Malabari, S. V. V., R. Bangaruswami, K. Iswara Dutt, N. Raghunathan, M. Krishnan; of writers on educational problems, Zakir Husain, S. R. Dongerkery, C. D. Deshmukh, D. S. Kothari, K. G. Saiyidain; of the critics, Sri Aurobindo, Ananda Coomaraswamy, B. S. Mardhekar, B. Rajan, K. D. Sethna, S. C. Sen Gupta; of economists, M. G. Ranade, V. G. Kale, B. R. Shenoy, V. K. R. V. Rao, K. N. Raj and A. K. Sen; of political scientists, M. Ruthnaswamy, K. T. Shah, R. Bhaskaran, A. Appadorai, M. R. Masani; of sociologists, D. P. Mukherji, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Irawati Karve, Kishor Gandhi and M. N. Srinivas; and of writers of travel-books, K. P. S. Menon (*Chungking Diary*, *Russian Panorama* and *The Flying Troika*), Sadhan Kumar Ghosh (*My English Journey*), K. M. George (*American Life through Indian Eyes*) and Aruna Asaf Ali (*Travel Talk*)—here's a whirl of names and titles to show that the 'prosaists' are a varied, talented and enterprising lot. With about 10,000 books in English—books of all kinds—being published in India every year, almost every genre is being attempted, and publishing facilities too are increasing in spite of the spiralling production costs and the in-built resistance in us to book-buying. The radio talk is yet another genre coming into vogue. The script is usually written in advance, and it is read out—rather than spoken—under artificial conditions, and it is heard listlessly by an unseen but scattered audience. The limiting circumstances are too many, but now and then we have an enjoyable talk like Chalapathi Rau's on the modern Indian 'socialite' or a weighty and overwhelming demonstration like the following by M. Ruthnaswamy:

Few rulers, single or in groups, have been able to resist the corruption of power. Lord Acton's dictum 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely', now quoted almost *ad nauseum* in every journalistic reference to power, has been proved throughout history. The corruption of power takes generally the form of tyranny which is an abuse or misuse of power. The pharaohs of Egypt; the tyrants of Greece and of Sicily; the despots of the East; Alexander the Great; the dictators of Rome, Marius and Sulla; the emperors Tiberius, Caligula, Nero and Diocletian; the mediaeval podestas, the tyrants of renaissance Italy; Philip V of Spain; Louis XIV of France; the Czars of Russia, from Ivan the Terrible to the last of them; the tyrants of the French Revolution, Danton, Robespierre, Saint Just, Marat; Napoleon,

who put down the tyranny of the Revolution with the tyranny of the Empire; and the modern democratic despotisms of the Third Empire in France; the Second and Third Empires of Germany, and the totalitarian tyrannies of Nazism, Fascism and Communism—no country, no people, no age of history, no system of government seems to be free from the taint of this original sin of political man.

What seems to be a mere catalogue has here become a telling demonstration of the truth of Lord Acton's dictum on Power.

We shall now turn, in the next chapter, to a rather more detailed consideration of three of our masters of prose, S. Radhakrishnan the philosopher, N. Raghunathan the essayist, and Nirad C. Chaudhuri the historical critic and interpreter of the Indian personality.

XXIV

Three Prose Writers: Radhakrishnan, Raghunathan, Nirad Chaudhuri

The three masters of prose here singled out for a more detailed consideration than was feasible in the previous chapter are, on a superficial view, very different from one another. Professor Radhakrishnan, the best-known of the three, is a philosopher-statesman with an international reputation, a scholar with a phenomenal memory, a resourceful and eloquent and effective speaker, and a voluminous writer with an uncanny flair for lucidity and epigrammatic strength. Raghunathan, better known by his nom-de-plume Vighneswara, is a deep student of English and Sanskrit literature, and was for many years the leader-writer of the *Hindu*; but it was as the writer of the 'Sotto Voce' weekly causeries that he made a significant impact on the readers of *Swatantra* and *Swarajya*. Nirad Chaudhuri, an "unknown Indian" till 1951 when his *Autobiography* made him famous, is a master of prose style, an intellectual who has the courage to stand aside and be different from the crowd, a critic of Indian society with an almost Swiftian capacity for making surgical probes. Each in his own way has tried to interpret Indian history and thought, and although their approaches are different, there can be no question about their integrity. Radhakrishnan is, perhaps, more of an eclectic, Raghunathan more of a conservative, and Nirad Chaudhuri more of an irritant gadfly—but these are really deceptive terms. Scholars and thinkers at once, they are all equally fascinated by Indian—or Hindu—thought, they are equally critical of the latter-day obscurations and perversions, and equally sensitive to the glassy undying essence, the true inwardness of Indian culture. They differ only in their sense of measure, the degree of objectivity they bring to their studies, and the extent of inclusiveness in their views.

Born in 1888 at Tirutani, Radhakrishnan had his education at Tirupati, Vellore and the Madras Christian College. He completed his masterate thesis on 'The Ethics of the Vedanta and its Metaphysical Presuppositions' in his twentieth year, and since then his pen in the service of his mind has not been idle. As a teacher of philosophy and as a writer, Professor Radhakrishnan held on with tenacity and a sense of dedication to a course chosen sixty years ago. He has taught at the Madras, Mysore, Calcutta and Oxford Universities; he has been Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra and the Banaras Hindu Universities; he has presided over the UNESCO General Conference and the All India Writers' Conference; he has been President of the Sahitya Akademi and of the P. E. N. All-India Centre. He has delivered the Kamala, Bampton, Haskell, Miller, Upton and Hibbert Lectures; he has addressed the World Congress of Faiths and most of the university convocations in India. After Independence, he became Chairman of the Universities Commission, India's ambassador to Soviet Russia, Vice-President and finally President of India. As ambassador, he divided his time between Moscow and All Souls, Oxford, and completed his English translation of the principal Upanishads. These diplomatic and political diversions have been a great gain to the nation without being a serious loss to philosophy. During the ten years of his Vice-Presidency and the five years as President, Radhakrishnan had to be continually on the move, making numberless speeches, opening conferences, welcoming foreign dignitaries, and participating in official functions of all kinds. That in spite of all that ceaseless hurry and glare of publicity Radhakrishnan always managed to speak very much to the point, that his speeches—even the most casual ones—were broadly related to his own central philosophy of life, was the true measure of his distinction as a thinker and speaker. The range of his interests, the sweep of his mind, the commendable catholicity of his tastes, and the temper and quality of his eloquence have marked this man of "words and wisdom" (as Sarojini Naidu once described him) a Guru for his contemporaries.

Professor Radhakrishnan was hardly forty years old when his public image—a spare tall figure, a keen yet serene face, a pair of eyes that showed no fret or wavering, an alert head mounted

by a white turban—was already as familiar abroad as in India. And the adventures of his mind and the pilgrimages of his spirit were recorded in a series of books that quickly arrested the attention of scholars all over the world. A tentative study, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1918), was followed by the more ambitious *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* (1920), in which Professor Radhakrishnan subjected the thought of Western thinkers—for example, Bergson, William James and Bertrand Russell—to a searching examination in the light of the absolutist thought of the Upanishads. The book was brilliantly polemical and showed Radhakrishnan's complete intimacy with Western thought on the one hand and his complete mastery of the English language on the other. In the meantime he had been commissioned by J. H. Muirhead to write a history of Indian Philosophy, and the first volume of this formidable undertaking appeared in 1923, and the second four years later. They remain to this day the standard treatises on the subject, being neither too diffuse and unmanageable like Surendranath Dasgupta's massive tomes nor too compact like Hiriyanna's single volume. In Radhakrishnan's masterly survey, proportion and clarity were the most striking characteristics. As the late Mahamahopadhyaya S. Kuppuswami Sastri remarked at the time,

Professor Radhakrishnan's volumes on Indian philosophy easily surpass similar works about the same subject in respect of form and matter, in respect of expository brilliance and estimative tact, and in respect of textual correlations and technical elucidations...the gripping and living interest of Professor Radhakrishnan's volumes, which successfully exhibit the course of Indian philosophical thought as a perennial stream of progressive sweetness, and the ancient makers and moulders of this thought, not as so many embalmed corpses, but as living embodiments of philosophical insight and continually suggestive forces of well-regulated reason.

The double merit of the work was that it was an interpretation of Indian philosophy from within, and it was also an exposition of Indian philosophical thought in an idiom at once intelligible and attractive to the West. That he was no mere historian of Indian philosophy but also a thinker in his own right, that he

was a Hindu for whom philosophy was not just a cloak but rather a way of life, a means of understanding life and a force for changing life, was presently revealed in his Upton Lectures (*The Hindu View of Life*, 1927) and the wide-ranging Hibbert Lectures (*An Idealist View of Life*, 1932). These lectures were addressed in the first instance to Christian audiences in the West. The apologist of the Hindu view of life—and of the 'idealist' view of life in terms mainly of Advaita Vedanta—had to speak in an idiom that could define the uniqueness of the Hindu and Vedantic view of life, yet insinuate its filiations with the Western Christian way of life. He explained things with a lucid clarity that seemed to be almost deceptively simple:

Every sinner has a future eve.; as every saint has had a past. No one is so good or so bad as he imagines. The great souls of the world address themselves to the task of rousing the divine possibilities in the publicans and the sinners....

Hinduism is a movement, not a position; a process, not a result; a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation. Its past history encourages us to believe that it will be found equal to any emergency that the future may throw up, whether on the field of thought or of history.

If that was Hinduism, said many Christians, well, they were Hindus too! But A. C. Underwood, in his *Contemporary Indian Thought* (1930), voiced a mild protest:

The Hinduism of the *Hindu View of Life* is not Hinduism as it is, or ever has been; but as Professor Radhakrishnan would have it to be after he has remoulded it nearer to his heart's desire.

P. T. Raju too has complained that in his earlier writings and speeches Professor Radhakrishnan was prone to assume the incompleteness of Indian thought and to advocate the incorporation of elements from Western thought wherever necessary. What Radhakrishnan had tried to do was (in his own words) "to look upon our ancient faith with fresh eyes" and to attempt a new enunciation "with special reference to the needs of a more complex and mobile social order". Any great religion is a function of both constants and variables. As he said in his *An Idealist View*:

If experience is the soul of religion, expression is the body through which it fulfils its destiny. We have the spiritual facts and their interpretations by which they are communicated to others, *sruti* or what is heard, and *smriti* or what is remembered. Sankara equates them with *pratyaksha* or intuition and *anumana* or inference. It is the distinction between immediacy and thought. Intuitions abide, while interpretations change.

In every religion there is the mystical core, which age cannot weaken, nor modernity render superfluous. There are, however, the other features of religion—the subtle intellectual formulations, the encrustations of dogma, the load of ritual, the draperies of custom—and these might call for change and undergo change without affecting the potency of the core. Radhakrishnan was bold enough to rethink the ends and means of human life in the wider perspective of traditional Hinduism and modern thought. There are no new questions in philosophy; the old questions—What do I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?—are as valid today as ever, but one's answers need to be formulated in relation to contemporaneous urgency. Rammohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda had felt in their time the need to restate what in their opinion was of abiding significance in Hindu thought. It was now Radhakrishnan's turn, and circumstances and his extraordinary combination of qualities enabled him to appeal to a world audience, and to bring the West and the East to a closer understanding than ever before. "The *liaison* officer", so C. E. M. Joad hailed Radhakrishnan in 1933, and the description was not inappropriate. In the arts of life (and the arts of death), the West is supreme; yet there is surely something basically defective in the civilization of the West. Following the lead of the great Indian seers from Yajnavalkya to Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan exhorts the West to respond to the intimations of the Spirit; and, at the same time, asks India (and the East generally) to take due note of the scientific and technological achievements of the West. The engine of the human intellect is necessary; but it is not enough. Writing after the publication of *An Idealist View*, C. E. M. Joad said:

Thus Radhakrishnan invokes the religious insight of the East to give a spiritual background to the recommendations of the worldly wisdom of the West...Radhakrishnan confirms, in a word, by the

light of the spirit the practical ethic which we in the West have hammered out by the experimental methods of science. Here, then, is the most notable of the bridges that he is seeking to build between East and West.

And of course the clarity and beauty of the writing was not a little responsible for the success of the book. As a reviewer wrote in *Theology*: "Such clear vigorous English can only come from clear and vigorous thinking. Now and then it rises to heights of poetic diction, and we feel that the author adds the sensibility of the artist to the intellect of a scholar".

An Idealist View of Life is unquestionably Professor Radhakrishnan's most valuable contribution to constructive philosophy, for in it East and West meet creatively and achieve a voice of articulation intelligible to all. What is the function of philosophy? It is, says Radhakrishnan, "to provide us with a spiritual rallying centre, a synoptic vision, as Plato loved to call it, a *Samanvaya*, as the Hindu thinkers put it, . . . a spiritual concordat which will free the spirit of religion from the disintegration of doubt and make the warfare of creeds and sects a thing of the past". The philosopher's plain duty, then, is to "find out whether the convictions of the religious seers fit in with the tested laws and principles of the universe". And this is what Radhakrishnan sets out to accomplish in his Hibbert Lectures. A good teacher, he knows the art of taking his listener from the familiar to the recondite. Thus, for example, about the Hindu theory of Karma:

The cards in the game are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to past Karma, but we are free to make any call as we think fit and lead any suit. Only we are limited by the rules of the game. We are more free when we start the game than later on when the game has developed and our choices become restricted. But till the very end there is always a choice. . . . Even though we may not like the way in which the cards are shuffled, we like the game and want to play.

The whole work is verily a compelling spiral of argument in defence of the idealist view of life, for "it is this mysterious, unclear and inarticulate knowledge (of the universe as Spirit) that brings us closest to reality".

It was on 28 June 1938 that Radhakrishnan delivered the British Academy lecture on a Master Mind, his subject being

Gautama the Buddha. The address was given extempore, and we have this testimony from Sir Francis Younghusband:

Before an audience of the leading men of letters and philosophers in the country, he was able, without a note and without a single hesitation, to deliver a discourse which enthralled the meeting and brought not only Buddhism but Hinduism right home to us in England.

The address has since been published, and we can see how well Radhakrishnan traces the evolution of Gautama the Prince into the Buddha, summarises his teachings, relates them to the current of religious thought in India, and stresses the universality of the Buddha's central message no less than the minor inadequacies of Buddhism in practice. The lecture is a fine example of exposition, and the citations from world literature, the epigrammatic asseverations, poetic flashes and flights of eloquence are all in the authentic Radhakrishnan manner. There are also significant asides, as for example:

The quiet end of the Buddha contrasts vividly with the martyr's deaths of Socrates and Jesus. All the three undermined, in different degrees, the orthodoxies of their time. As a matter of fact, the Buddha was more definitely opposed to Vedic orthodoxy and ceremonialism than was Socrates to the state religion of Athens, or Jesus to Judaism, and yet he lived till eighty, gathered a large number of disciples, and founded a religious Order in his own lifetime. Perhaps the Indian temper of religion is responsible for the difference in the treatment of unorthodoxies.

This is Radhakrishnan's way of telling a British audience that religious tolerance has been a hallowed tradition in India.

Dr. Raju thinks that Professor Radhakrishnan's more recent writings, in contrast with the pre-1930 utterances, seem to assume "the self-sufficiency and self-completeness of Indian thought". Actually it is no more than a shift in emphasis. During the latter half of his life, Radhakrishnan brought out authoritative English renderings of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1948), the *Dhammapada* (1951), the *Principal Upanishads* (1953) and the *Brahma Sutras* (1960). In other words, he went back to the living waters of the Indian philosophical tradition and found them (so to say) more self-explanatory and self-adjusting to

changing circumstances than any exegetical edifices could by themselves hope to achieve. If the younger Radhakrishnan saw Hinduism more in its visible dynamic aspects, it is but natural that the mellowed Radhakrishnan should rather go to the invisible underground river—the abiding springs of Indian philosophical thought. Between Radhakrishnan's earlier and later writings, however, falls the important collection of lectures, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1939), the first harvest of his Spalding Professorship at Oxford. In effect it was a history of the religions and philosophies of the West and the East, studied mainly in their mutual interactions. Western thought *had* been influenced by the wisdom of the East; and the world's great religions *had* met and mingled in the vast crucible that was India and contributed to their mutual rejuvenation and enrichment. The evolution of a World Soul (superseding the Wellsian World Brain) was thus no chimera but a reasonable possibility, if not a near certainty. Having persuasively posited this possibility, it was easy for Radhakrishnan to return to India's ancient scriptures and try to present them anew to the world. There was no inconsistency or contradiction here. The wheel was returning where it started from, and one can see in the corpus of Radhakrishnan's philosophical writings a rounded completeness and fulfilment.

In his most recent work, Radhakrishnan seems to be poignantly conscious of the need for a new faith adequate enough to meet the challenges of the nuclear and space age. Out of the variety and opulence of the world's spiritual experiences, can we not forge a new faith, a new way of life, that is based on a creative alliance between the intuitions of the world's religions and the discoveries of modern science? *Religion in a Changing World* (1967) is a collection of eight essays with a running thread of earnest argument. Man's view of the world has been changing fast consequent on the current pace of scientific and technological change as also of political and social change. What is the role of religion in this changing world? The traditional religious sense of awe and reverence and fear and hope must needs come to terms with the fascinating and bewildering world as revealed by science. Can we eschew dogma and ritual, because they generally divide humanity, but retain the quintessential religious

sense? Can the religions of the world enact purposive fellowship and make feasible a world community? Yesterday people thought that religion was not enough; today people are coming to realise that scepticism too is not enough. We have, then, to go beyond dogmatic religion and dogmatic scepticism alike and seek the springs of a new faith:

We need a faith that is reasonable, a faith that we can adopt with intellectual integrity and ethical conviction, a large, flexible faith for the whole human race to which each one of the living religions can bring its specific contribution.

And such a faith can be based only on the ineffable spiritual experiences and intuitions of the various world religions:

The time has come for us to join in unity of spirit, a unity which embraces the richness in which religious realities which have found expression in other faiths are not destroyed but cherished as valued expression of the One truth. We understand the real and spontaneous impulses which led to the formulation of the different faiths. We stress the touch of human warmth, compassion and sympathy that pervade the works of the finer minds of the faiths.

Radhakrishnan's argument is weighted with his learning and is tuned up to the present crisis in civilization when the issue is between world annihilation and world redemption:

The advance in science and technology has widened the gulf between our intellectual progress and moral stagnation. If the human race is threatened with the doom of self-destruction, it is because of himself. Tools which can help to build an earthly paradise, if we are in harmony with each other, threaten annihilation, since we are fighting with one another.

It is through "experiential religion" alone, in which man exposes himself to the deepest aspirations of future humanity, that the crisis can be met and mastered and the world made safe for the future. Radhakrishnan's writing here is characterised by simplicity, directness and forthrightness, as if the time for decision is *now* and mankind cannot play at brinkmanship any longer. He struck the same note in his Centenary Convocation Address at the Madras University:

The main cause of our malaise is our uprootedness. We are detached from our spiritual foundations which give us poise and balance. Many of us have lost our historical roots and become exiles from our past. Things nearest to us in time are not nearest to us in spirit. The froth on the surface of history does not count so much as the deep underlying currents. . . .

Science does not suggest the omnipotence of matter. It suggests the supremacy of man. . . . The word *Brahman* connotes both the truth which is sought and the spirit in us which seeks it. A scientific view of the world reveals to us a central mystery which is not disclosed to scientific observation. Our attitude to it should be one of piety, humility and adoration. We must acknowledge that truth belongs to God and ideas belong to men.

Science enlarges our concept of God and religion saves science from going astray. Religion should not end in wars and inquisitions, nor science in Hiroshimas and Nagasakis. It is said that a man without religion is like a horse without a bridle. . . .

Detractors have said that Radhakrishnan is a historian of Indian philosophy—a scholastic—a theologian—rather than a creative thinker in his own right; that he is, at best, a philosopher in the Western, rather than in the traditional Indian, sense; that he is too amazingly versatile, too tantalisingly learned, too much wrapped up in the blaze of publicity, and too terribly successful in life, to be a real philosopher! Can it be that Professor Radhakrishnan too (like the hero of Graham Greene's novel) is "a burnt-out case"? The truth, however, is not far to seek. Genius is indeed three parts memory and one part industry; and while Professor Radhakrishnan's memory is phenomenal, his industry is prodigious. He continues to read voraciously, and his intellectual curiosity is insatiable. Memory and industry, curiosity and sense of adventure, adaptability and the readiness to meet any new challenges whatsoever, all make an impressive budget of qualities. Yet these alone cannot explain the phenomenon that is Professor Radhakrishnan. Without the reserves of the spirit, the inner poise, the hidden fire, all other endowments cannot count for much. And the spirit that moved and sustained our ancient Indian Rishis and Acharyas is not foreign to Professor Radhakrishnan, and it is this alone that can explain the splendour of his ministry over a period of half a century. Whatever the outer envelope of his thought, it is always illumined in some measure by the spirit of the rishis of old; and this is the reason

why his writings and speeches command respectful attention everywhere.

One of our great journalists, N. Raghunathan of the *Hindu* became, late in life, the columnist who wrote under 'Sotto Voce' and signed himself as 'Vighneswara'. After a life-time of training in the exacting discipline of expression in a difficult foreign language, Raghunathan now revealed himself as the perfect humanist and the flawless literary craftsman. As the months and years passed, the 'Sotto Voce' weekly essays, with their tone of quiet assurance and look of effortless ease, became the standard-bearer of traditional values and robust sanity in a world of noisy slogans and deafening cries. Raghunathan's was usually the conservative, unpopular, 'diehard' view; his assent with tradition was apt to assume the tone of dissent from current notions of progress; and yet his views couldn't be dismissed as of no consequence, for the undertones of assent and dissent came with an accent of authority that compelled attention if not acquiescence. The elephant god 'Vighneswara' of the Hindu pantheon is both massive in bulk and slow in gait, but he has an infallible skill in works, he has a steady and clear and whole view of what he deigns to see, and he has a sense of unruffled commitment to the tasks on hand. He is at once the perfect guide to the world of knowledge and the perfect dispeller of the obstacles to right knowledge. There was thus a certain challenge in Raghunathan's assumption of 'Vighneswara' as his nom-de-plume, but we can now see that the name wasn't taken in vain.

Raghunathan discontinued the 'Sotto Voce' feature a decade ago, but the series of essays has been collected since in the volumes *Sotto Voce: The Coming of Freedom* (1959), *Our New Rulers* (1961), *The Avadi Socialists* (1964) and *Planners' Paradise* (1970). He has also published *Reason and Intuition in Indian Culture* (1969), being his Madras University extension lectures, but the 'essay' seems to be his real forte. Of Bacon's 'essays' it has been said that they might be Minerva's own lucubrations. Of the best essays in the 'Sotto Voce' collections too it could be said that they might be the Elephant God's own sallies of the mind. Whatever the subject—economics, politics, education, social life, literature, music, philosophy—it is touched with the seal of universality. Reading these hundreds of exercises in con-

temporaneous comment after the lapse of many years, one can see the ribbon of stern purpose running through them all. Beneath the superficies of contemporary life and the flare-up of sharp opinion and violent action, there is the deep underground river—not immediately seen but real all the same—which is the true source of vegetation and life on earth. The culture of the people—the complex of *swabhava*, *swadharma*, *swatantra*, *swarajya* that is the true index of this culture—has been the slow creation of the ages, and may not now be crudely tampered with except at the risk of our total discomfiture. Indian 'spirituality' isn't something opposed to life and world affirmation. Spirituality is an awakening to the inner or true Reality of our being, and once we have our feet on the Ground of Reality, our everyday movements will be steady with an instinct for poise and a sense of direction. But how does one achieve contact with the Ground? Reason is a wonderful analytical instrument, but the Base eludes it. Hence the need to invoke the higher-than-mind faculty, which for want of a better term we call intuition. Once the contact with the Ground has been established, reason may be left to steer the surface movements with sureness and ease. This alliance between intuition and reason—this clue to enlightened and wise living—Raghunathan calls *viveka*. Without the continual exercise of *viveka*, man would be but a forked animal, a siege of contradictions and frustrations. The 'integrated' man is one who has achieved a harmony between himself and the world, his inner and his outer life, his thought and his word. On the other hand, like the plane that zigzags when taxi-ing and somersaults when taking off, the man afflicted with *pramāda*—the man without *viveka*—has a clouded consciousness that knows neither right measure, *mātra*, nor self-restraint, *dama*, but is a prey to egoistic separativity and the misery arising out of it. The task of *viveka* is to maintain measure between the eternity that is Self and the manifoldness of the phenomenal play. In literature, the particular is so seized with sensibility that the particular itself becomes charged with universality. Literature makes such a feat of transcendence possible because of the alliance of creative imagination and deep sensibility, which correspond to the two terms of intuition and reason. Just as *viveka* in action and behaviour lies, not in running away

from life's responsibilities, but in mastering and exceeding them, so too aesthetic experience is meant to be, not an escape from life, but rather a seeking after quintessential life, being absorbed in it, and distilling a joy from it akin to the Bliss of Brahman. In setting forth this argument in his lectures, Raghunathan has loaded every rift with the ore of apt scriptural citation. It is the statement of his faith as a Hindu and as a *sahridaya*, and this is a helpful point of reference to understand the musings and animadversions and gentle exhortations in the 'Sotto Voce' volumes.

Raghunathan's feeling for tradition doesn't of course make him a stick-in-the-mud obscurantist. He is fully aware of the tempo of change in this age of nuclear power and space travel. Change is easy, and as dangerous as it is easy; but stagnation is no less dangerous. The problem, then, is to preserve the right balance between change and stagnation, to retain the soul in its purity and power, yet permit the body's growth and development and facilitate the education of the mind in the context of advancing science and technology. The Church, the Academy, the University have at different times fulfilled the role of preserver of the values of culture without preventing legitimate change and healthy growth. Dr. F. R. Leavis says rightly that the University is

...society trying to preserve and develop a continuity of consciousness and a mature directing sense of value—a sense of value informed by a traditional wisdom. The Universities are recognized symbols of cultural tradition—of cultural tradition still conceived as a directing force, representing a wisdom older than modern civilization and having an authority that should check and control the blind drive onward of material and mechanical development. . . .

Tradition, or the total content of a cultural heritage, is kept alive through study, appreciation, and healthy criticism, and it is enabled through contact with other (or even 'alien') traditions and new ideas to refresh itself and march towards the future. But a hideous bottom-like translation cannot be a wise thing, or lead to any good. In the modern world it is the University that should serve as the natural harbourage of the intellectual, but the tragic fact is that the universities as a whole

have failed the country. Since the true intellectual is becoming a scarce commodity in the university, the responsibility of the unattached intellectual is all the greater. His is, of course, the narrow thorny path, but then the macadamized roads of pushing-on are *not* for the intellectual. The intellectual (or, more accurately, the ex-intellectual) who is ready to shed (or has already shed) all vestiges of independence can now make good hay in the sunny Indian climate, and that is what he is doing. In an outspoken article on 'the Indian Intellectual', Nirad C. Chaudhuri remarked several years ago:

Today, in our country, virtually no intellectual effort is perceptible, if by intellectual effort is meant a ceaseless activity of self-criticism, both personal and national, and the steady formulation of new ideas, values and ideals. That kind of intellectual activity seems to have gone out of our contemporary life.

The fatal lure of the City and the seductive blandishments of the Welfare State are but one part of the disease that has overwhelmed the Indian intellectuals. There is then the ever-expanding bureaucracy, the permanent enemy of all intellectual effort or achievement. But Nirad Chaudhuri has put his finger on more deepseated causes still. For example, there is the Indian intellectual's "disinclination for hard work", and his readiness to forget that the inertia of the mind is even greater than the inertia of the body, and that the unemployed mind, like the unemployed body, tends (in Pigou's phrase) "to become unemployable". Another reason is the Indian intellectual's "unfamiliarity with Indian conditions and traditions, and, as a necessary complement of this weakness, a servility to purely borrowed moulds of thought". But, above all, the Indian intellectual's failure stems from his basic failure of faith and inspiration:

If Indian intellectuals had more of either they would certainly have received such strength from these as would have enabled them to fight their battle. No one fights or strives unless he has a stake in life, and the Indian intellectuals have none. They are egotists and dilettantes as a consequence. They want to get something without paying the price.

Hence the importance of people like Raghunathan (and Nirad Chaudhuri himself) who are willing to follow their daemon

whithersoever it might lead them, who are unmindful of the hazards on the way, who are ready to reject compromises even if dictated by Authority, and who are courageous enough to preserve their integrity and are ready to praise the past where it is worthy of praise and to condemn the present where such strong condemnation is called for. A purposive backward glance now and then can have a tonic effect on us, and an intelligent scrutiny of our abiding gains from the past can be a spur and an inspiration to our present labours. Paying a tribute to Ananda Coomaraswamy, Raghunathan says:

Thanks to him and others like him there is today a minority that cares passionately for our great heritage and is eager to make it a live influence again. He lamented, 'A single generation of English education suffices to break the threads of tradition and to create a nondescript and superficial being deprived of all roots—a sort of intellectual *pariah* who does not belong to the East or the West, the past or the future'. Remember that the man who felt our cultural degradation so keenly was by blood only one half Indian.

Coomaraswamy was a host in himself, with an encyclopaedic range of understanding and an uncanny capacity for direct spiritual apprehension of the issues involved in any inquiry; and although born a Ceylonese, and although he rendered notable service to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts as Curator during the last thirty years of his life, he felt inwardly closer to India than most Indians. In his classic *Dance of Shiva*, Coomaraswamy brought out the rhythm of Indian philosophy, "this deep slow breath of thought...those virtues which, above all others, the soul of Europe needs today: tranquillity, patience, hope and unruffled joy—like a lamp in a windless place that does not flicker". But Coomaraswamy saw no *essential* difference between the West and the East, for both speak—once we are prepared to make the necessary allowances for the 'differences of dialect'—the same language of the spirit.

Raghunathan writes with affection and discerning appreciation about others besides Coomaraswamy, and the words glow with life; and greatness, in the process of being reassessed, re-enacts itself before our eyes. When Mahatma Gandhi suffered

martyrdom on 30 January 1948, Raghunathan was stirred to the depths:

When Bharata asked, 'Where is my father gone?', Kaikeyi quietly replied, 'He has gone the way of all flesh—yea, he has, he the Raja and Mahatma, splendid in his virtues, great in sacrifice, the refuge of the good and true'. That magnificent epitaph, proclaiming at once the vulnerability of the clod and the Promethean fire that informs it, may be applied with equal appropriateness to Mohandas Gandhi. To such as he Death comes, secret and shame-faced, like a thief in the night. One instinctively thinks of that glorious figure on the lonely beach at Prabhasa absolving the piteous wretch *Jara* with a word of cheer and a benediction.

May that divine forgiveness illumine India's heart. Then indeed will Gandhiji's great faith, his noble audacity be vindicated.

Writing of the composer-saint Tyagaraja—writing, not in a mood of anguish, but in the fervour of rich reminiscence—Raghunathan highlights a segment of South Indian history and also makes a neat point with persuasive force:

When the cultural history of India comes to be properly written, the migration of small but dynamically active groups from one linguistic area to another will be seen to have exercised a catalytic influence. The handful of Telugus long settled in the Tamil country were one of the most important foci of that continual excitement which hovered like a spirit on the troubled waters of the Carnatic in the eighteenth century

It was a time of unparalleled efflorescence. Poets like Ramabhadra Dikshita and Yajnanarayana Dikshita who had revived the splendours of the Augustan Age of Sanskrit literature, *jivanmuktas* like Sadasiva Brahmendra and Upanishad Brahma Yogin, *prabhandakaras* like Narayana Tirtha, operatic composers like Melattore Venkatarama Sastri, polymaths like Govinda Dikshita and grammarians of music like the gifted son Venkatamakhi blazoned the name of Tanjore in a trail of glory which reminds one of the Age of the Imperial Guptas or Athens in the days of Pericles. No wonder that when the seed of the *Tāraka mantra* fell on such rich soil it should have borne such glorious fruit as the 'Tyagopanishad'. It is the most heartening proof of the vitality of our civilization.

To Raghunathan, Bharatavarsha is not the ridiculous concoction 'India that is Bharat'—a truncated India and a fissured Bharat at that—but verily the Mother, the Mother of her forty or fifty

crores of children. A passage like the following has a winged quality almost:

It is Vyasa in the *Vishnu Purana* who utters it with the impassive simplicity and stately majesty of the *arsha*: 'That land which lies to the north of the sea and the south of the Himalaya is known as Bharata and its progeny as Bharatee'. . . .

There were three Bharatas famed in song and story. And well may the land be proud of their name...Jada Bharata for detachment, Bharata the son of Dasaratha for loyalty, Bharata the son of Dushyanta for valour—it is on this tripod that Bharata Dharma securely rests. And for every true son of Bharata Bhumi she is at once mother and goddess. There is a mystic presence behind her myriad shapes and forms. There is no *vana* but has its *vana devata*. And not all the political chicanery of partition and division can persuade me—and millions like me—that we must look with an alien eye on any spot in this sacred land that has, since the dawn of creation, owed allegiance to the supreme ideal of Nara-Narayana.

Equally evocative is the description of Badrinath in a later essay:

All Badari Vana—the enchanted ground between the two guardian mountains—is sacred. In the background lies, and ever will, the inviolable majesty of Nilakantha. The inseparables, Nara-Narayana, the first of the rishis, are eternally established in *tapas* here. They are the guardian saints of Bharata Varsha, Fountains of Grace for the hero aspirant—*anugrahaya atmavatam anukampaya*, in the stately phrase of Suka. And here Uddhaba, the footstool of the Lord, bears witness to the Divine mercy that endures for ever.

On the other hand, when the occasion calls for it, Raghunathan can also write in a critical vein. Thus of Jinnah:

His political associates cowered before him, fascinated as is the tiger's victim by the ruthless magnificence bearing down upon it... He lacked magnanimity. Mr. C. R. Reddy has spoken of him as the Coriolanus of Indian politics. But Coriolanus, who poured out his contempt on the tribunes of the people, reserved his highest admiration for a worthy foe like Aufidius; his tortured love for his country was none the less love although it had turned to hate. When the Mahatma's tragic death wrung from Mr. Jinnah an unwilling tribute, he needs must diminish it by remembering that Gandhiji was the leader of the Hindus. . . .

Scattered over the essays are flashes of irony, sarcasm or satire, and the writing is pungent and fiercely edged:

In the post-Gandhian war for power the first casualty is decency. ...in a world that has lost its moorings, the Secular State is the Servile State.

The fallen Archangel was for ever preoccupied with God. And the architects of our Secular State are incessantly thinking of religion.

Like an old wife adding up her pence he (the Prime Minister) reckons with glee that two and a half crores of people in all came to see him. And he has persuaded himself that the adventure in mass contact *de luxe* by IAF plane has made him the symbol of India's unity.

... for all the brick and mortar magnificence of our umpteen National Institutes, the pure scientist is almost nowhere in the Bhatnagar scheme of things, while the technologists and engineers are being ordered about by half-baked foremen imported from abroad.

Seminars are the current pastime of that new species of lepidoptera, the international dilettanti. They take all humanity's tantrums for their province. Between an *al fresco* lunch and a sumptuous dinner, they will neatly dispose of the growing pains of Asian nationalism, colour prejudice in Africa, Communism in East Europe or any other question that might baffle Sphinx. To the study of India's 'social tensions' they take *con amore*. Here is unlimited scope for that universal benevolence which they shed like dust from their diaphanous wings. . . .

The caucus rule that is enthroned in the University has made it an auxiliary to the power game. Well might Diogenes take up this lantern and ask, 'The University? Where is it?'

From the first causerie to the last (there were about five hundred of them in all), Raghunathan is revealed as the man of steady wisdom, the scholar steeped in Sanskrit, Tamil and English, the reverent student of the sacred lore of India, and the bemused and ironic observer of the Indian scene from the vantage ground of his scholar's sanctum. He writes on the whole with classic sobriety even when the pen is occasionally dipped in sarcasm or satire; he is unperturbed, and is evidently imperturbable as well. The river of his style—broad and slow and clear, with a deep rumbling organic richness of sound—flows on and on, and we too are carried with it. The style is indeed the man, and is the expression of a consistent and rounded philosophy of life; one must respect it even when one cannot always agree with his conclusions. It is a very personal style too, for nobody

can write exactly like Raghunathan. Less razorsharp than Rajaji's, less nervously sensitive than Nehru's at his best, less candidly crystalline than Srinivasa Sastri's, less obviously high-sounding than Radhakrishnan's, less coruscatingly brilliant than Chalapathi Rau's, less recondite and heavily impressive than Nirad Chaudhuri's, Raghunathan's style has yet a distinctiveness of its own, marked by a Sanskritic flavour, a sweep of comprehension, an undertone of *dhwani* and a poise and a structural adequacy that are the marks of a mastery of the medium. Raghunathan writes as one who has a sense of belonging utterly to the great cultural tradition of our country, and as one who is unafraid to stand up to intimidation by what passes for modernity. If he is occasionally harsh it is only because he is austere wise, and also because he writes on things that really matter to him. He has confessed to "a quite primitive objection to coercing or being coerced", and to "an obstinate faith in freedom as the basic social value". And, ultimately, the attraction and strength of his writing comes, partly no doubt from his immense learning and experience and his habit of sober reflection, but equally from his firm anchorage in the Spirit.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is 'the grand solitary' among our writers, to borrow a phrase from Raghunathan though used in a different connection. "I had hardly met an Indian writer", said C. R. Mandy once, "with such coruscating intelligence; his brain dances like fireflies before the monsoon...I would always rate him—cerebrally and stylistically—in the top class of Indo-Anglian writers". Another admirer, Khushwant Singh, wrote in the *New Statesman*:

Chaudhuri writes the English language better than any Indian has done before and is much the most erudite writer in the country. His encyclopaedic knowledge has made him somewhat of a legend; he is meticulously painstaking about what he writes and is particularly felicitous in expression. He is provocative and at times offensively anglophile at the expense of his countrymen.

It was in 1951 that Nirad Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* made him suddenly—and deservedly—famous. A visit to England followed, and this was the theme of his second book, *A Passage to England* (1959). Ten years later

appeared his third (and most controversial) book, *The Continent of Circe*. There is in India today no writer, perhaps, who is more austere conscious of his vocation as an intellectual, or who takes more pains with his writing. He is the gadfly, he is the Geiger counter looking for hidden obliquities of self-deception, he is the fiercely honest and unsparing critic of men and morals and manners in contemporary India. The truth about him seems to be that he is at once more Indian than most Indians and more English than many Englishmen. With this double edge of sensitivity he achieves insights denied to most, but he also isolates himself from the crowd. Hence his solitariness, and the strength—and the weakness—arising therefrom.

The *Autobiography* is confessedly “more of a national than personal history”, the environment being given precedence over the product. The places that had an influence on Nirad’s boyhood, the family antecedents, the rural cultural milieu, the nationalist fervour in the wake of the Partition of Bengal, the cold war between the ruling and subject races, the city and the university of Calcutta, the coming of Gandhi and the eruption of the “new politics” of the twenties—these many environmental layers receive as much attention as the quirks and quiddities of Nirad’s own temperament or the vicissitudes of his childhood, boyhood and youth. As he writes in the opening para of his Preface:

This book describes the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decades of this century. . . . My main intention is thus historical, and since I have written the account with the utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the aspiration that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history.

It is clear, then, that Chaudhuri’s real aim is to write history, and the autobiographical exercise is merely a means to get the history started. Early in his college days he had fallen in love with history and had hoped that he would become in due course a professor and a historian. Stubbs and Green and Mommsen had been his first favourites, but soon his horizon widened as a result of his regular pilgrimages to the Imperial Library at Calcutta:

In the three months of the summer vacation of 1917 I read every nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century classic of history, and made myself perfectly familiar with the history of historical writing. In this study Lord Acton and Dr. Gooch were my principal guides.

It was not mere reading, however, for he also acquired "an unshakable faith in historical integrity" and set forth his views in an "Essay" on 'The Objective Method in History' written while still an undergraduate in January 1918. The "Essay" is now reprinted in full in the *Autobiography*, and it is certainly a remarkable demonstration (Chaudhuri was twenty at the time), as impressive in the marshalling of detail as it is forceful in the summing-up:

Who would think of judging the world by standards either Indian or European? It (historical thought) must take its stand on broader human grounds. When all is changing no *one* attitude would serve as a measure of progress. In this infinitely complex and infinitely vast mass of ever-changing things nothing supplies us with a safe anchorage save the objective method. Such a conception of history cannot think of being partial or impartial. It shows a development and lays bare its causes . . . it has grasped the unity of history in time as well as in subject-matter. The hero of this history is man in all his developments and in every climate.

Re-reading his own essay thirty years later, Chaudhuri comments:

In formulating my conception of history, I was moving away, in relation to my past life, from the ethical standpoint to an amoral intellectual need, and in relation to my countrymen and contemporaries I was erecting a barrier of intellectual isolation which was to become more and more impenetrable with the years. The essay was the manifestation of a revolution within me, completed on the subconscious plane, a revolution leaping out in full panoply like Athene from the head of Zeus, which made me take an intellectual view of existence in a society which was completely anti-intellectual.

Chaudhuri passed his B. A. with first class honours, and started studying for the M. A. degree. His ambition was, not merely to take the degree and get a professorship, but to become a historian:

My insane ambition was to combine Mabillon, Muratori, and Tillemont with Gibbon. The idea of a gigantic *corpus* piling itself up in annual volumes throughout a life-time, a single-handed *Monumenta* of Indian history rivalling the corporate *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, and the idea of a stupendous synthesis written on a grand scale over decades and revised on an equally grand scale over succeeding decades obsessed me at the time. If the synthesis was not to be absolutely like Eduard Meyer's *Geschichte des Altertums*, the least it had to be was Stern's *Geschichte Europas*. . . .

Chaudhuri's standards of scholarship and history were indeed unexceptionable and terribly exacting, for as we read in the later book, *The Continent of Circe*:

I know who is learned and who is not. I am not. In order to convince the reader that this is not insincerity I shall mention the names of four men whom I regard as truly learned. They are Mommsen, Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Harnack, and Eduard Meyer. When young and immature I cherished the ambition of being the fifth in the series. So I could not have been very modest. But a standard is a standard.

And yet, for all his sterling aspiration and fury of preparation, "the great adventure came to nothing". His nerve failed him in the end, he didn't sit for the whole examination, and he wouldn't make a second try. As he gloomily records:

I entered the world in 1921, and for sixteen years after that suffered such poverty, want, and humiliation as I cannot wish even an enemy, if I had any, to be punished with. The worst of it was that there was nothing heroic or ennobling in this suffering...if in carrying on this struggle I at last found a vocation, that happened more through a sort of natural selection than any conscious or well-directed effort of my own.

He seems to have drifted from Government service to journalism and somehow kept his body and soul alive—achieving survival and renewal akin to the "phenomenon of moulting in birds"—but his failure to find his true vocation must have rankled still. By temperament, aspiration and arduous training, he was meant to be a historian, but the fates had decided otherwise. This set-back was like a deep wound to his sensibility, and it soured his temperament not a little. "Today I nurse no grievance".

he says, "because I have at last unravelled the genesis and growth of my maladjustment". On the other hand, the years of poverty and obscurity seem hardly to have affected his intellectual vigour or his sturdy independence of mind. Success and fame have at last come to him in abundant measure, but the old scars remain still and although the past can be rationalized it cannot be completely wished away.

This must explain Nirad Chaudhuri's unconventional progress to history through autobiography. His preoccupation with history in general and Indian history in particular is apparent throughout the *Autobiography*, but in its last long chapter, 'An Essay on the Course of Indian History', the mask is cast off and the historian is revealed in all his panoply of massed knowledge and defiant self-assurance:

The thesis of this book has been taking shape in my mind for over twenty years...if I have tried to arrive at conclusions which will remain valid for all time, I have also taken a very large field and body of reference from which to draw these conclusions. I have read the history of my country, a history of some three thousand years, and tried to connect it with what is known of the entire history of mankind. I have also observed the events and phenomena around me in my own life. I have meditated over what I have read and what I have observed, formulated conclusions and rejected them, until those that survived became irresistible.

Pursuing the 'objective method', Chaudhuri speaks rather unflatteringly of the people of India even in this "Essay" written twenty years ago:

...the Hindus always advertised their sense of being an aristocracy living among hostile and inferior aliens, being always in danger of being swamped by them. . . . In this matter the ancient Hindu reminds one of the modern White, more especially the Boer, in South Africa. . . .

No great political concept has ever governed political life in India which has not been created by foreigners, and none but foreigners have ever been able to establish and maintain stable political regimes in this country.

Of Indo-English (or Indo-British) relations, and the need for a new basis of honourable understanding, Chaudhuri writes:

My notion of what is proper and honest between Englishmen and Indians today is clear-cut and decisive. I feel that the only course of conduct permissible to either side in their political and public relations at the present moment is an honourable taciturnity. The rest must be left to the healing powers of Time.

Yet, in Chaudhuri's case, "honorable taciturnity" took the shape of a formidable demi-octavo volume, and there are things said in it that had, perhaps, been best left unsaid. If Chaudhuri is ashamed of the behaviour of the anglicized Indians after independence, he is even more sorry for the behaviour of our ex-rulers. In the days of British rule, the Western attitude (as Chaudhuri points out in his later book, *The Continent of Circe*) "did not go forward from anger to understanding", while the Hindu revisionists merely got angry "without understanding the Western reaction". Today there is a show of new friendliness, which is merely repulsive; "its visual complement", says Chaudhuri, "is a collection of faces so greasily made up that as the lips open to utter the inane yet leering civilities, thick drops of greenish oil seem to roll out of them". In the Englishman's eyes, the yahoos of yesterday have changed of a sudden into the houghn-hnms of today; and in the Indian's eyes, the lepers of yesterday have now been transformed into angels and ministers of grace!

In his second book, *A Passage to India*, Chaudhuri set down with candour and percipience the impressions of his visit to Britain in 1955, an elaborate postscript to the chapter on 'England' in the *Autobiography*. He is quite at home in Western literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and his immense but well-digested learning is revealed on almost every page of the book. He writes as always clearly, avoiding woolliness and loudness alike. He seldom attempts humour, and when he does, it is apt to be heavy. He sees things with almost a child's insatiable curiosity but records his findings with a picturesque vividness, and generally with judicial balance as well. Again and again, he compares conditions in India and England, and this gives a piquancy and edge to his writing. On the issue of secularism, for example, Chaudhuri writes (no doubt remembering what a fetish we make of India being a so-called 'secular' State):

I do not think that there is any pretence of secularity in any aspect of the civilization of the English people. . . . Even their deepest and highest scientific thought would not have been what it is except for that deep brooding over the mystery of existence which religion alone has fostered so far. In saying this I am not thinking simply of Newton, or Faraday, or even of Rutherford, Jeans and Thomson. Even if all that could be forgotten, there would still remain the *mores* of the whole people, which are infused with the spirit that Christianity created.

. It is felt instantaneously in the reverence which accompanies their religious rituals. I noticed this in the behaviour of the choir boys in King's College Chapel. As they went about placing the music and books on the stands, they looked like young priests. When they sang they appeared angelic, so that I wanted to say as Gregory the Great had done, 'Not Angles, but angels. . . . It was symbolic of the transformation of those wild folks from the Germanic forests and Scandinavian fords into civilized people.

Scholarship, understanding, insight, a sense of history, a capacity for imagination and an uncanny feeling for words have fused to make a passage like the above, and Chaudhuri's book is full of such admirable spans of prose art that seek to build a bridge of understanding between Britain and India.

The Continent of Circe, which followed in 1965, is described as "an essay on the peoples of India", and Chaudhuri hastens to add that the word 'essay' is used in the sense of "a trial in exposition". He further explains that the main purpose of this book is to describe the peoples of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analyse their collective personality in the light of the historical evolution which formed it". The motto of "this series of works" is *Know Thyself*—and its equivalents in the other great languages of the Indo-European family are also given. Here, at last, Nirad Chaudhuri is launched on a historical undertaking commensurate with his early ambitions as well as his colossal equipment and sense of mission. In the pages of *The Continent of Circe*, Chaudhuri has also thrown suggestive hints regarding other "projected works" in the series:

One day i shall write a whole book to describe what we in Bengal did by way of replying to the British contumely. . . .

I shall not discuss these later phases (of Hindu sensuality) in this book, for they will form the subject-matter of another book dealing with the modern life of the Hindus. . . .

I shall deal with the Sikhs in a future essay devoted to the political evolution of India. . . .

In all the essays I have planned to write on Indian life, the Hindus will necessarily figure as the main character, and in one or two even the only one. . . .

I cannot contemplate another cycle of subjection for my people, though watching the doings of all those concerned, including our Government which is the blindest of all, I cannot see how the fatal drift can be arrested. Even so I shall make a last attempt, in fact the present series of books which I may not live to complete is that. I say to myself that if I am to be a Cassandra let me at least be a positive Cassandra.

Although he disclaims learning, his learning now impresses more than ever. For example, after expressing his disagreement with Professor Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the *Acts*, ch. 17, verse 26, Nirad writes:

...what was uppermost in St. Paul's mind was the diversity of mankind rather than its unity, except in worshipping one God. I went on to say that the word 'blood' in the A. V....in Greek was *haimatos*, did not occur in the great Uncials, especially the Codex Vaticanus, and was to be found only in the Textus Receptus, the Codex Bezae, the group of Syriac MSS known as HLPS, and in the Peshitto version. In Latin it was found only in the old Latin translation in the Codex Bezae. . . .

Lest we should feel quite overwhelmed, Chaudhuri considerately adds this footnote:

It must not be imagined from this that I lay claim to Biblical scholarship. From my student days I was fascinated by the Acts of the Apostles, and at that time was reading it again in the monumental edition of Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake. Being also interested in textual criticism, I naturally paid attention to the apparatus criticus. Full of my newly found knowledge, I spilled it out at every opportunity, and Dr. Radhakrishnan presented a tempting flank, too tempting indeed for my cavalry not to make a dash at it.

These disclaimers notwithstanding, the reader is duly impressed. Already, in the *Autobiography*, Chaudhuri had affirmed that "the true autochthon of India has the one immutable role of wearing out, outraging and degrading everything great and good

that comes into the country from abroad, and Hinduism...has always been an admixture of foreign goodness and indigenous abasement". Here were the germs of the thesis that have since grown into the frightening proportions of *The Continent of Circe*. The central thesis is that, of the peoples of India, while the 'Hindus' are the arrivals from Europe—from somewhere between the Danube and the Volga—via Persia, the 'darks' are the aboriginals or the survivals from the remote past. "The aboriginals of India", says Chaudhuri, "had happiness in their blood, and in their free state neither would nor could be cured of it". The Hindus are what they are because they are the victims of Circe; the 'fair' European-Aryan has become the brown Hindu whom the climate of North India has enfeebled in body as well as mind. Chaudhuri sees a close parallelism between the plight of the Westerner in India and that of the ancient European in Aryavarta: "racial pride and sense of superiority; segregation of the conflicting elements; aggressive self-defence; suppression and unconscious ill-treatment of the indigenous population; unwillingness to share culture; and continual mental strain". And Chaudhuri adds triumphantly:

Multiply the experiences of the latter (the British) by fifteen, and you get the Hindu, but still with much less than fifteen times the nastiness. For this at least the Hindu deserves credit. To put the matter briefly, the Hindu is the European distorted, corrupted, and made degenerate by the cruel torrid environment and by the hostility, both real and imagined, of the true sons of the soil.

"Trying to escape their swinish plight, the Hindus cling to certain old memories — the veneration for the Veda, the obsessive feeling for a 'fair' skin, the sentiment for rivers, and the worship of the cow. When the Hindus wish to defy the situation in which they find themselves trapped, they resort to asceticism or occultism; or there is the 'anodyne' of sex, which proves a mockery too in course of time; or they surrender to the 'Hindu acedia'—religiosity and senility and quarrelsomeness and sheer bad language and manners. The Hindu wife, for example, could be an exasperating creature, yet somehow "an alkali is always present in the acid of Hindu life":

So, one might say, that for most Hindu husbands the wife is a beautiful bath of gleaming porcelain, with both cold and hot water taps, with this difference, however, that the taps are not under control but flow as they list, and by turns the husband is bathed in a cool spray of love or scalded in a geyser of anger.

This is a fair example of Chaudhuri's heavy and laboured humour, but such instances are rare. As regards the Muslims ("the least of the Minorities"), the Anglo-Indians and the Indian Christians, Chaudhuri has few words of approbation for them, and as for the anglicized Hindus ("the dominant Minority"), he has nothing but vitriol:

They play for small stakes in a small way, and remain satisfied with their small gains. The result is that their whole existence is utterly trivial. . . .

Swift made them (his Yahoos) scraggy and hideous, and in turning away from them a decent man could feel he was being uncharitable to them for an ugliness over which they had no control and not for their moral ugliness. But no decency can be offended by turning away from the new Hindu Yahoos. They are plump, sleek, solemn, and even smiling when out for self-interest. They have no ugliness which is not of their own making.

But why should I concern myself with them?... But I would save my fellow-beasts. They do not, however, listen to me. They honk, neigh, bellow, bleat, or grunt, and scamper away to their scrub, stable, byre, pen and sty.

Tears roll down the cheeks of Circe. The great sorceress weeps to see the completeness of her handiwork.

This is like Pope screaming in fury against Sporus—but what has happened to Nirad Chaudhuri? He has rescued, he claims, his own European soul from Circe, and recovered his Ariel's body from Sycorax. Then why not show a little compassion to the other 'victims of Circe'? Why does he write as though the springs of compassion are wholly dried up within him?

But this too is not the truth, the whole truth. If in the *Autobiography* there are passages of splendid evocation like—

The rain came down in what looked like closely packed formations of enormously long pencils of glass and hit the bare ground. At first the pencils only pitted the sandy soil but as soon as some water had collected all round they began to bounce off the surface of

water and pop up and down in the form of minuscule puppets. . . . As we sat on the veranda, myriads of tiny watery marionettes, each with an expanding circlet of water at its feet, gave us such a dancing display as we had never dreamt of seeing in actual life—

the *Continent* too has passages of sheer beauty like this describing the East Bengal sky:

Our sky was a soft infinity rising from the earth to the unknown and the unknowable in equally soft steps. Nearest to us were the clouds, never resting, never in one place, never of one colour, never of one tone. At sunrise and sunset our minds could soar up through their pile on pile, and layer on layer, of yellow, gold orange, red, pink, and gray to the blue spaces beyond, and our child-mind did go up. The blue, too, was of the softest—not even K'ang-Hsi blue was softer—and it seemed to be the colour of space condensed into mist. At night we could see stereoscopic distances and depths within it, regions after regions of the planets, of the galactic stars, of the star-clouds of extra-galactic systems, without end from galaxy to galaxy, and never offering any friction to the mind in its ascent to the stellar universe.

It was Archimedes who is said to have remarked that he would be able to lift the world itself with a lever, if only he could find a base of operations outside the world. Nirad Chaudhuri, himself a Hindu living in Aryavarta, wants to explore and expose and interpret and judge the Hindu in his homeland. In the nature of things it is impossible. Sometimes Chaudhuri takes himself to be the prototypical Hindu but more often as the exceptional Hindu, wholly out of tune with his environment. He has developed a sort of love-hate relationship with India and the people of India, and his approaches, although professedly objective, are necessarily subjected to the pulls of his own tremendous egotism. Burke said, "I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole nation", but Nirad Chaudhuri is doing this all the time in *The Continent of Circe* and in the recent *To Live or Not to Live* (1970). He veers dangerously between the subjective and the objective approaches, between the particular and the general, between fact and opinion, between the past and the present. His amazing scholarship no doubt gives ballast to the craft of his wayward sensibility, and the Latin tags, French quotations, German titles

and Sanskrit citations sometimes introduce an element of the agreeably exotic and extraneous. And what is one to say when Chaudhuri compares the Western Powers that came to India's aid at the time of the Chinese invasion with *Mahabharata* figures like Aswatthama, Kripa and Kritivarma? When all caveats have been made, however, Nirad Chaudhuri remains the Grand Solitary, the master of a prose style that has often a fascinating spidery quality, a writer and a thinker and a universal Momus who stands apart from the muddy mainstream. His great merit as an intellectual is that he isn't ever too lazy to avoid doing his own thinking or too timid to hesitate to give outspoken expression to his own views. Above all, he has the supreme faith of the moral man in an amoral (if not immoral) society to make the great categorical affirmation: "Whatever clever people might say in defence of unscrupulousness in politics, and about its success, there is some power in the universe which sees to it that such cynicism does not pay, and that nothing but what is inherently right ever succeeds".¹

¹It must be said in fairness to Nirad Chaudhuri that his extremist stance has almost become a necessity for him. At he is reported to have told an interviewer of the *Times* of London about three years ago: "People are about half and half, against me and for. Previously all were against me. I know I am extreme. It is like a tug-of-war: I cannot stand up straight, or the other side will pull me down. But I know my exaggerations".

Poets Again

While it may be readily conceded that prose is the staple food of the countries of the mind, yet the point needs urging that without the wine of poetry life would lose its savour and become merely a tasteless traffic of hours accumulating into years that presently make a whole life-time. Let us grow by all means foodgrains and cabbages, for we need them for our body's sustenance: after all, though man shall not live by bread *alone*, he cannot live without it either. But roses—however few, however rare—are what make life ultimately worth living. Not the body alone, nor the mind alone, but the soul also needs to be fed; and the body, although it might be a wonderful piece of work, the cunningest thing under the canopy of heaven, has meaning only so long as the soul—that invisible less than atom that is still infinite sensibility and limitless possibility—inhabits it, lights it, and charges it with significance. Poetry is of little use, but of great *value*: like Beauty, or Goodness, or Love.

In an earlier chapter, I discussed the poetry of Sarojini Naidu, whose destiny it was to bring occasionally the enchantment of poetry to the dry, dry-as-dust deliberations of political assemblies. Her brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, is a poet too, and as a member of Parliament over a decade ago he used to bring in light verse and even passionate poetry to redress the balance of prose argument or noisy rhetoric. When Harindranath's first book of poems, *The Feast of Youth*, appeared in 1918, Sri Aurobindo found in it

... a rich and finely lavish command of language, a firm possession of the metrical instrument, an almost blinding gleam and glitter of the wealth of imagination and fancy, a stream of unfailingly poetic thought and image and a high though as yet uncertain pitch of poetic expression...the beginnings of a supreme poetic utterance of the Indian soul in the rhythms of the English tongue.

Although born in a Brahmin family, his childhood and boyhood days in Hyderabad with its composite culture—Hindu Vedantic and Islamic Sufi—doubtless made a mark on him. Proceeding to Cambridge, Harindranath was engrossed for a time in Blake, and through all the vicissitudes of his chequered career he has retained his early interest in mysticism. Since the publication of *The Feast of Youth* fifty years ago, numerous collections of poems and plays (and even a book of reminiscences) have come out, the more important titles being *The Magic Tree* (1922), *Poems and Plays* (1927), *Strange Journey* (1936), *The Dark Well* (1939), *Edgeways and the Saint* (1946), *Spring in Winter* (1956), *Masks and Farewells* (1961) and *Virgins and Vineyards* (1967). In his autobiography (*Life and Myself*, 1948), Harindranath reveals the core of his faith as well as his endless interest in the process of poetic creation:

Since my youngest days, I have somehow sensed a deeper law which operates behind us, above us and around us; the law which never goes awry, and which has no truck with twisting and turning points, and squeezing out its own workings, deviations and interpretations which insult the truth itself. . . .

I dwelt more and more...in the innermost recesses of the heart from where poetry comes. Words and phrases became an obsession; thoughts floated across the mind like clouds, some delicately tinted, others stormy, but past all their movement I began to grip more firmly the thought. . . .

In the course of his life he has veered spasmodically between the extremes of Aurobindonian mysticism and Marxian materialism, and he has sampled every variety of experience and exploited every possible mood, pose and stance. The result is a body of verse that has truly impressive bulk, though it is also, inevitably perhaps, of rather uneven quality.

Even in his first volume, as we read lines like "He is throbbing in the crystal magic centre of my dreams" or "a glimmering peacock in my flowering flesh" or "every note is crushed to silent sorrow in the song-bird's throat", we can visualize the youthful poet, his eyes in a fine frenzy rolling, his hand turning out of the poetic forge phrases of such a delicate and haunting beauty. In the 'Prelude' to his *Edgeways and the Saint*, published almost thirty years later, Harindranath said:

I, poet, dip my pen
 In mine own blood to write my songs for men,
 Since every song is but a keen self-giving
 To tired life which, now and then,
 Seems but a drab apology for living.

And always he writes because he cannot help writing, and also because poetry is man's—the poet's as well as the reader's—elemental need: no expendable luxury but the very oxygen of existence. His excessive facility has been the cause of the failure of much of his poetry, and yet when moment, mood and word fuse into a harmony he can write very moving poetry indeed:

O pain, I love the lonely wine-red gleams
 Within your deep and ever-wakeful eyes:
 Old Arab in the dark tent of my dream
 Under the burning skies.
 Excess of ecstasy, immortal pain,
 Comrade of love, companion of desire,
 Lone Bedouin riding through life's desert plain
 A camel of red fire.
 Most splendid traveller of eternity
 In whose first footfall the wide world began,
 A holy Mecca in the heart of me
 Awaits your caravan.

When the mood for philosophizing is upon him, Harindranath sometimes strikes the right note and avoids mere banality:

What are we, alas!
 But frozen shadows seen, as in a glass,
 Each moving to his cold self-built tomb,
 Pale-passioned spectres passing in the gloom
 Awhile into mere deadness and decay?

Like many a poet, Harindranath too is never less alone than when alone:

When from the crowded ways I move apart,
 Silent ancestral seers I seem to meet
 Treading the lonely roadway of my heart,
 The rhythm of my footfall in their feet.

Like Vivekananda, like Subramania Bharati, Harindranath too feels overwhelmed by the mystic vision of the 'dance of doom'. For Vivekananda and Bharati, it is Kali who destroys the worlds in a frenzy of dance, and then creates them anew as Shiva the auspicious approaches her and quenches her divine rage. Towards the end of the third chapter, I quoted from 'Kali the Mother' by Vivekananda, and I might here give a stanza from Bharati's *Oozhik-koothu* (in Prema Nandakumar's English version):

When the knocking and the breaking
 Beat the rhythmic time,
 When the sparks from your eyes
 Reach the ends of the earth,
 Then is the doomed hour
 Of universal death!
 Mother, Mother,
 You've drawn me
 To see thee dance!

But for Harindranath, it is Shiva who is lost in the *thandav* — the mystic dance of doom:

In a rich rapture of intoxication
 Dream-lost you move from deep shadowy deep
 Along infinitudes of mortal sleep
 Which veils the naked spirit of creation.
 Star upon star breaks forth in swift pulsation
 And multitudinous oceans swell and sweep
 Behind you, and enchanted forces leap
 Like giant flames out of your meditation.

Your dreaming done, once more you dance your reckless
 Dance of destruction, and from globe to globe
 You wander, fashioning a mystic necklace
 Of shattered worlds...

The paradox of paradoxes is that the creator is also the destroyer, dread Mahakali is also the world-creatix, and Shiva the auspicious is also Rudra-Shiva the fierce destroyer of the worlds. in the poem that serves for a motto in *Masks and Farewells*, Harindranath enunciates a double paradox: Life is but Death

unmasked, and Death is but Life unmasked. If 'death' is a taunt, a challenge and a bottomless mystery, 'birth' is a mystery too:

The new-born infant brings
In its closed fist
Centuried winters, autumns, summers, springs:
Indestructible mystery,
Ineluctable history
Of—I exist!

And if any, only the poet—the artist—can see through the paradox of appearance and glimpse the Reality behind:

What do you notice in an artist's eyes?
A fire that burns
Incessant and inward, and all falsehood turns
To ashes, since he knows no compromise;
His vision. . . moulds the abstract image into shape
Yielding to man the rapture of a God,
Bringing illumination to the blind.

Innumerable are the bursts of songs in the corpus of his poetry, and the reader is delighted but often disappointed because of the frequent padding and the mere decorative vocabulary. His rhymes too—eyes, skies; fire, desire; god, clod; bliss, kiss—even when they are not repeated in more than one poem do make the reader take a defensive attitude towards Harindranath's poetry.

He is not happy in his longer flights, though there are bright patches in poems like 'The Hunter' and 'The Holy Shadow.' The sequence of poems in *Spring in Winter*, however, has also a cumulative strength. It is the nearest in quality and urgency of expression to *The Feast of Youth*, and has the freshness and force of a second spring—or, rather, the splendour of the after-glow of the evening Sun. "It is only after fifty one loves", says Harindranath in the Preface; "under fifty one only falls in love". The 209 lyrics that make *Spring in Winter* are a poetic record of such a late efflorescence of love, and have an authentic ring throughout. Like most of Harindranath's lyrics, these too are simple, sensuous, direct, neither stale nor startling and avoid prose and mere pose alike. 'Little One' with her beauty and love made the poet at 53 feel like 25—it is a renewal of life, yet no

pale repetition. This transforming experience has given the poet a new power of utterance. When the loved one is away, "every moment seems to be a menaced eternity dragged out for execution". Even more than the joy of union, it is the agony of separation that evokes from the lover aching cries as in:

Heart-martyrdoms
I bear for your sake, my Beloved! ...
There is a stab-sense
Bleeding me white
Each time I write
A lyric bemoaning your absence!

Towards the end of the sequence we see the poet awaiting his Beloved in a mounting agony of expectancy:

Tonight the night to me is very dear:
The poem is returning to the poet.

The lover's varied moods and fancies, faithfully rendered in these lyrics, give this sequence something of an orchestrated unity of its own, and the book carries the legend: 'From Any Lover to His Beloved'. A personal romantic experience has thus become a poetic paradigm of lovers' ways and moods and aches and joys without reference to time or place.

In his most recent *Virgins and Vineyards* — apparently a "work in progress" — the poet is letting himself go, mixing memory and reverie, fact and fancy, politics and philosophy, and there is in the meandering lines a mingling of metrical ease and verbal fluency, and some attempt too at the formulation of a personal Testament; and there are also, though not as frequently as one would wish, sudden jets of pure poetry. But one must wait for the completed work before one ventures on a definitive assessment.

Verbal and metrical facility is Harindranath's main strength—and also, when the inspiration is dry or the content thin, his fatal weakness—as a poet. Although he is not unsusceptible to mystical states or unresponsive to mystical intimations, he is not primarily a mystic poet, nor a philosophical poet either. There are difficulties in subsuming mysticism or philosophy in poetry. "The essential condition of philosophical poetry is", says

Middleton Murry, "that the poet should believe that there is a faculty of mind superior to the poetic; that was possible for Dante; but since Shakespeare lived and wrote it is not possible". But wasn't Goethe a philosophical poet? Hasn't Sri Aurobindo—both believing "that there is a faculty of mind superior to the poetic" and being endowed with such a mind—written what is undoubtedly the greatest philosophical poem since Dante? Again, in Sir Muhammad Iqbal's *Asrar-i-Khudi* (translated as *The Secrets of the Self* by R. A. Nicholson), there is an attempt to effect the marriage, not only of poetry and philosophy, but also of Eastern mysticism and Western realism; and poetry was for Iqbal the fusion of an integral philosophy and a complete science to serve as the base for the ultimate emergence of the perfected man of the future. Although Iqbal was an admired and honoured son of pre-partition India, he is now counted among Pakistan's prophets and is acclaimed as her greatest poet. But these barriers created by the politicians cannot circumscribe poets like Tagore and Iqbal, for they truly belong to both India and Pakistan, and indeed to the whole world. Unlike Iqbal, who was essentially a poet though he made philosophy the subject of his poetry, Brajendranath Seal and Surendranath Dasgupta were primarily philosophers though they also turned to poetic expression for a change. Brajendranath's *The Quest Eternal* (1936) is described as a poem on "the stuff of our life, the warp and the woof of our world-consciousness, iridescent instinct flashing into reflection". As in Bridges's *The Testament of Beauty*, there is in *The Quest Eternal* too a fusion of reason and imagination, historical reality imprisoned in Time and essential universality transcending Space and Time. Brajendranath divides his book into three 'quests'—ancient, mediæval, modern—and in the third he is at last vouchsafed the Vision of Psyche:

I was one with all creatures: their life, mine:
 I sang on every bough; from rock to rock
 I leapt, snorting the crisp air; in the stream
 I frisked or dived or bathed my plumage gay

Until one reddening dawn
 A hooded hawk swooped down; the royal eagle
 Sailed in, and eyed the quarry from the heavens!

I saw where throned in the universal Deep
 Eternal hunger sat his Queen beside,
 The Nightmare Fear-of-Death, dark Shapes
 That rule, misrule, the chaos-dance of Death-in-Life!

Surendranath Dasgupta's *The Vanishing Lines* (1956) is a collection of thirty-two lyrics (mainly renderings from his own original Bengali) that opens to our gaze the whole panorama of the soul's landscape, thereby enriching our understanding and infusing in us a sense of restrained, if also purposive, elation. Surendranath is attracted to Nature, but even more to the transcendent reality behind the flux of colourful appearance. The music of ineffable Silence is sweeter far than the melodies that actually reach the ear. The unseen intuited vision is more satisfying than what strikes the naked eye. What we see or hear is implicated in the changing unreal, but Reality is for always, and it is the changeless One. Surendranath is prone to see the universe in himself and himself in the universe. Answering the question, 'Is Mother Nature within or without?', Surendranath affirms:

The appearance of beauty in manifold forms,
 Plays on the thousand strings of the heart,
 And rouses the deathless beauty in the mystic cavern of the soul.

Surendranath's poems, so fresh from contact with life and nature, so rich in their imagery and so eloquent in their expression, are nevertheless a philosopher's poems, suffused with a studied seriousness and marked by a formal elevation of style; they have also a hardness of texture and carry a rounded fullness of meaning.

In the same class is K. M. Panikkar's *The Waves of Thought* (1944), translated from his own *Chinta Tarangini* in Malayalam. It is a ruminative poem, a wistful looking back, at the green fields left behind, from the rising mound of advancing age. For years and years, for decades almost, we only look forward, but the turning point comes at last. A terrible moment it is when it comes and henceforth we can but cast longing looks behind. One needs all one's philosophy to survive the moment, but one usually does survive, one learns wisdom—the wisdom of repose, the wisdom that comes as the fruit of chastened quiet and serene

contemplation. The fever subsides, and one is afraid of the future no more. This is the psychological basis of Panikkar's poem. The opening stanza arrests the reader's attention at once:

The dreams of my youth,
The many coloured visions of a glorious future,
Where indeed have they faded and gone?
Unless it is to measure the winding path of the dead past
With the rod of regret.

Power, fame, wealth, success, romance all have failed to return the expected dividends; dead sea fruit, what a distaste they have left behind! The contemplative mood leads the poet from one wave of thought to another, and another, till he stumbles on the truth:

Real peace can only be known
Through an even mind, rooted in love
And nourished in the feeling of oneness
With all created things.

If philosophy is on the whole an intractable subject for poetry, mystical experience is too remote from everyday life to admit of easy commerce with poetry. Gilbert Highet, having in mind poets like Donne, Holderlin, Valery and T. S. Eliot, says that they "had a certain experience of life which they found so complex, so dangerous and alarming, so much profounder than normal thought and living, that they *could not* communicate it in ordinary speech—not even in ordinary poetic speech... only in poetry which was deliberately fragmentary and inadequate and symbolic". Of course, Highet concedes that Dante was the great exception, the solitary ultimate poet—and we might add Sri Aurobindo also, for he is for our age what Dante had been to his. But however remote mystical experiences may appear to *us*, to the mystics themselves such experiences are the very food of their soul's existence; and when they strive with language to effect the recordation or projection of their experiences and visions, we have to approach such poetry in a mood of total attention so that communication may be firmly established. The danger with 'mystic' poetry is that it often degenerates into mistiness, an ineffectual wordy beating in the void. But if

the experience is authentic, the poet *can* certainly give it a name and a form in terms of poetic image and symbol. Here as elsewhere, the fraudulent and the futile are no argument against the genuine and the triumphant. There is, for example Nirodbaran's *Sun-Blossoms* (1947), a collection of 99 lyrics. By professional training a physician, Nirod is intimate with the sickness of the human body; but he is also an explorer of the ineluctable territory beyond the visible world of Good and Evil, and he seems to have glimpsed the blinding, beckoning tablelands of the Spirit. His experience of physical pain is not held back or ignored; rather is it seized as a whole and exceeded by the radiance of the Spirit. When we fall upon Life's unpredictable thorns of adverse circumstance, we have this infallible way of effecting a cure for the bleeding wounds. We must firmly hold fast to the faith that there is a soul within and Grace above, and the rest is surrender, the grace of Grace, and "the golden wreath of crowning victory". In 'Earth-Martyrdom', Nirodbaran affirms:

It is the life within
That makes life beautiful:
Only the soul can win
The love of God and rule
Over the titan throng
That bars our heavenly flight...

Nirodbaran is no 'escapist', in the usual derogatory sense of the term. As a physician his days used to be spent in ministering to the bruised in body, in fighting aches and agues, in dressing wounds and giving injections. While not running away from this world of tribulation, Nirodbaran nevertheless accepts the even greater reality of the 'other' world—the ineffable Beyond—the world of intensities that is here and yet is not here. The lineaments of this 'other' world are indelibly engraved in Nirodbaran's consciousness, and memory and renewal alike compel tears of joy. It is the story of the plain bird and the golden bird once again: the plain bird is also the golden bird, bathed in the Sun's transfiguring rays—only it has not recognized the marvel till the climactic moment when the scales fall off and the truth stands revealed. Nirodbaran accordingly evokes the Invisible in terms of the visible in the following poem:

I come from deeps of untrodden snow,
 A winter bird;
 Each note of mine is a silver glow,
 A magic word ...
 In a cool shower my nectarous song
 Falls on the grass; ...
 Then is fulfilled
 My supreme truth,
 For life and death are secrets sealed
 Of eternal Youth.

Sorrow's heart-beats are no doubt quick and insistent, but their travail only hides a secret Becoming:

Then the coiled serpent-fire
 Rises again
 Into its rapturous heaven
 Without a strain
 Of time's flame-wavering mood,
 And a new birth
 Begins from the travail
 Of aspiring earth ...
 A divine beauty wakes now everywhere:
 Nature becomes a white
 Altar of Grace, an everlasting prayer
 Towards the Infinite.

A more accomplished craftsman in verse, K. D. Sethna has been following the profession of poetry with a sense of dedication for nearly half a century. *Artist Love* (1925) was followed by *The Secret Splendour* (1941) and *The Adventure of the Apocalypse* (1949). Like Nirodbaran, Sethna too has been profoundly influenced by the poetry and spiritual philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and, besides, Sethna has drunk deep in the springs of English and European poetry. 'Grace' could be cited as an example of his earlier work, fancy-fed and neatly-turned in phrase and light-glancing in its movement:

Take all my shining hours from me,
 But hang upon my quiet soul's
 Pale brow your dream-kiss like a gem.
 Let life fall stricken to its knee,
 If unto lone-faced poverty

You give your blessing's diadem.
 Make of these proud eyes beggar-bowls,
 But only drop your smile in them.

An even better lyric is 'This Errant Life', one of Sethna's best:

This errant life is dear although it dies...
 If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
 Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
 Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
 Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow,
 For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:
 Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
 And all thy formless glory turn to love
 And mould Thy love into a human face.

Earth and Heaven are here brought together in one rhythmic wave of utter comprehension. And 'Creators' is another fine poem, self-luminous, firm and delicately balanced:

Rooted in deep on measureless deep of love,
 A rapture-rock intense with quietude—
 They rise, companion-crests of dream above
 A shadowy world, in mystic parenthood.

Their children shall be eyes new-born to climb
 Out of old dark, kissed by a luminous swoon
 Of passion-prayer cleaving beyond all time,
 Two summits haloed by one perfect moon.

The lyrics in Sethna's third volume, *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, mark a further advance still in the nature of his inspiration and the quality of his poetic utterance. On 8 May 1948, he had a heart attack, and he had to remain in bed for two months. As if a spring had been released, he began composing poetry daily almost, and often several times a day: "I was writing with a kind of automatic energy. It was as if I were a mere gate through which poems strode out...I seemed to be plastic in the hands of the inner being". On the very day after the heart attack, Sethna wrote three lyrics, each in a different measure. Here are the opening lines of the first, 'Seated Above':

Seated above in a measureless trance of truth—
 A thunder wearing the lightning's streak of smile,

A lonely monolith of frozen fire,
Sole pyramid piercing to the vast of the One—
Waits Shiva throned on an all-supporting void.

Although confined to bed and submitting to the usual medical treatment, Sethna had a feeling of peace, a sense of the living presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and more and more poems seemed to write themselves out, as if insisting on utterance. A month after the heart attack, he wrote:

A month has flown like some Archangel's form
Dripping a light of God-drunk reverie.
And I have lain aloof and still to see
The truth-gold pinions of that singing storm.
Men move with days; but I have reached a rest
From where I view days moving wondrously
Out of an east of crimson gaiety
Unto a violet wisdom in the West !

Again, a month later:

Two months of song have swept my soul
Out to the very nerves of sense
And with the body's vehemence
I have taken to myself the whole
Wonder of the timeless Secrecy !

And, finally, on 9 August:

Forsake me not, Sweet Power !
Make my life music with thy kiss...

The 90 lyrics, long and short, are in a variety of metres, and the sequence may be described as a record of the beatings of the poet's heart as it turned more and more in complete surrender to the Divine. What is probably the central insight in the collection is conveyed through these lines:

....man's orb
Of vision can never absorb
The adventure of the apocalypse—
Until his passion inward dips
Where hides, behind both dazzle and dark,
Perfection's pigmy, the soul-spark

Plunged in the abyss to grow by strange
Cry of contraries...

Like Sethna and Nirodbaran, several other poets of the 'Pondicherry School' draw their inspiration from Sri Aurobindo. "In the radiant ethereal heavens of the Poetic Muse", says Dr. Kishor Gandhi, "Sri Aurobindo is the Sun round whom revolve his satellites, nourished and sustained by the light they receive from him". Of the older generation, Anilbaran Roy, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Dilip Kumar Roy, Amrita, Prithwi Singh and Punjalal, and of the younger generations, Romen, Themis, Prithwindra, Chinmoy, Shyam Sundar, Chimanbhai and others have been among the satellites, large or small or middling. Anilbaran's *Songs from the Soul* (1939) contains prose poems as well as metrical poems, one of the latter, 'Mahakali', standing out from the rest by its native power:

Thine is the fiery will that mocks
Faint-hearted compromise;
Ruthless thou sharest all that blocks
Our path to Paradise.
The thunders whirl at Thy command,
O flaming, beautiful Mother!
Thou smitest with one mighty hand
And savest with the other.

Nolini Kanta Gupta has authoritatively expounded Sri Aurobindo's thought in Bengali as well as English, but his poems are collected in the single volume, *To the Heights* (1944). There are nearly fifty pieces in the book, and one can trace in them a steady growth in aspiration and realization. This is the poetry of meditative thought, and it mingles the qualities of dryness and strength; but now and then a light leaps up and all is transfigured. Often the ideas are simple enough, though they are given forceful utterance:

I have now learnt to love the sun,
Even the sun of the burning desert...
Once I drew back from it
And liked the shade and the glade...

The lamp lies unlit and dismal dark—
Bring to it the spark of your morning love and life,
The lamp is lit and burns...

Supreme Artisan and Fashioner of perfection,
Atom by atom she builds up the world—she is slow,
patient, faultless.
And by her consummate craftsmanship the universe—
and each object in the universe—
Is a marvel of pattern, a model of divine arabesque,
A carefully wrought jewel.

**You were given to me as fire is given to flint...
A myth incredible which yet came to pass:
An Emperor as guest in a beggar's hut!**

But a guest is not a resident: he comes
 Only to go...when the brief blessed hour
 Shall pass as must all interludes divine
 In this world which cannot house such bliss
 For long—then what?...

Mira in Brindavan has a more dramatic cast, but here too discussions abound. Mira has a hard time with the Pundits, but she has her way at last, and those who come to scoff remain to become her disciples. In Act I, Mira talks to the Pundits in explanation of the change wrought in her:

How could I, rayless Mira, so opaque
 To His light, be touched by Him to incandescence?
 Nor could I believe this, till one day I
 Witnessed an accidental forest fire:
 I saw gnarled, ugly trees and withered grass,
 Sere leaves, dead twigs and miserable shrubs—
 All came to glow in a moment in the fire
 That touched them to its hue of liquid gold!
 Even so came my Lord to me, and then,
 By the magic of His Flute's flame-alchemy,
 He worked the miracle and kindled in me
 The resistless conflagration of His love.

Also worth quoting is Mira's song in Act III:

They ask: "For whom do you sing your songs
 For ever, endlessly?
 Whether one harks or no—you go on and on
 Pouring your melody!"

For whom stays rapt, in trance, the saint,
 Comes the artist, spring, our earth to paint?
 For whom do the skies, aflush, awake,
 And trees in laughter of green outbreak?

And yet they ask: "For whom do you sing...?"

Both as musician and as poet, Dilip has always had an ecstatic fascination for Mira's ministry of love. As he says in his long poem, 'To Mira the Beggar Princess':

O Beggar Queen! my heart accepts thy lead.
 But can one do aught else who once has heard
 With his mortal ears thy everlasting Voice?

Or this leaf from the *Mahabharata*, where we find Krishna speaking in defence of *karma* as against *jnana* alone:

only action can
Supply our urgent hungers which must dog
Even the man of knowledge. And so we find
That the highest sages all enjoin right action
Guided by knowledge, and discerning men
Condemn that barren gospel which extols
Pale knowledge divorced from dynamic action.

Amrita's *Visions and Voices* (1929), Prithwi Singh Nahar's *The Winds of Silence* (1954), Nishikanto's *Dream Cadences* (1946), and Punjalal's *Lotus Petals* (1943) and *Rosary* (1946) also contain meditative poetic prose or devotional lyrics. Prithwi Singh seems to have started writing poetry rather late in life, and the theme is almost as a rule Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. One of the rare exceptions is 'Kundalini':

The serpent rises from the inconscient deep
To join her luminous superconscient source;
Awakened from her coil-imprisoned sleep
Upward she mounts, uttering the Word of Force...

Punjalal's *sadhana* is of the baby-cat variety, unquestioning total surrender to the Divine and waiting on His Grace:

The less I seek, the more I find
Thy captivating Grace:
It comes and clasps my wayward mind
And greets me face to face.

Those that are chosen by Thy loving Grace
Are safe, although they may not seek Thy shade...

The key is with Thy Grace and not with me
To open for my soul the moon-white gate
That brings one face to face with the mystery
Of Thy maternal Love immaculate.

Romen's *The Golden Apocalypse* (1953) is a collection of nearly 100 lyrics, and again the perennial theme is the panorama of the Spirit's variegated landscape. What might seem to many to be elusive or immaterial are to the poet himself tangible and

real. The very titles of some of the poems—'The Dual Apocalypse', 'The Sapphire Shower', 'The Golden Rider on the High Steed of Flame', 'Orison of the Two-fold Sun', 'The Tiger of Gloom and the Lion of Light', 'The Harp of Light, the Torch of Flame, the Crown of Gold', 'The Night-cave of the Golden King', and so on—are rather characteristic of spiritual poetry like this. Romen evidently speaks or sings of things and experiences of poignant significance to him, though they might only intrigue the average reader familiar with the mores of sheerly secular poetry. But there can be no question about the inspiration or sincerity behind this kind of spiritual poetry, and this may be illustrated by the following from 'The Birth of the King':

Not from the womb-seas of perishing mortal time
Nor from the far star-driven destiny's will,
But from the occult, luminous vastitude
Of the unmanifested caves of the Supreme
Shall he rise, the youth-king of diamond Noon,
Not a frail infant in the cradle of sleep
But a conscious and embodied omnipotence
Unshadowed by fate and desire's vortex-whirls,
Flame-celled, marvellous, an amazing epiphany...

Themis's *Poems* (1952)—there are 75 lyrics in the volume—makes a more immediate impact on the reader than Romen's book. The lyrics are shorter, the stanza patterns simpler, the themes less obviously recondite. 'Truth' has a self-sufficient clarity and strength:

I do not try to cheat or please,
For He Knows, He knows;
The little honey-gathering bees
Do not cheat the rose.

Themis anticipates possible objections to her poetry and is content to stand her ground with the assurance of her total faith:

My songs have but a single theme:
Thy love, Beloved, and thy grace;
The world is but a dream in dream,
And Truth's the beauty of thy face.

Some say my themes are narrow, small,
 For they can hardly understand
 That Thou, O Love, art all in all,
 And all the worlds are in thy hand;

That when I sing of Thee, I sing
 Of worlds beyond and worlds above,
 That even the poorest song can bring
 Eternal answers from Thy love.

There is also V. Madhusudana Reddy, a university professor of philosophy, whose *Sapphires of Solitude* (1960) reveals on every page almost the influence of Sri Aurobindo. The 38 lyrics included in the book are quarried from the subliminal treasures of the poet. In the depths of the spirit, out of the marriage of azure and light, is born the image or the idea that is the hard yet translucent sapphire. Lyrics like Reddy's tease us with their unpredictable cataract of images, but when one tries to isolate their paraphrasable content, one is baffled a good deal. Being the record of a spiritual quest, this sequence of lyrics compels us to re-enact the trials and excitements and exhilarations of the quest and race towards the goal where the wings of glory brood in ineffable silence. How is the poet (always *the* problem for the laureate of the Spirit) to give utterance to what must for ever be wordless? Since mere logic will not do, the poet must needs invoke the magic of image and symbol, and make a leap from the bridge to the stream below:

Eternity
 Is like a rose of silence !...
 I am a poem of rose
 That comes squashing the prose
 Of the earth's maiden material...

Flowers, birds; roses, flames...the images appear, the images recur, the symbols make a music of strange incantation, and a victorious quiet imposes its reign. Reddy has a fair mastery of phrase and rhythm, and the literary echoes have a reverberating quality. The following lines—

It flashed upon my enraptured eyes,
 The splendour of a million skies—

recall Wordsworth, while Dowson is written in these lines:

And we have been faithful in our own fashion
To discussion.

These 'sapphires of solitude' are so many snaps of the Spirit's domains, some no doubt blurred and some rather casual, but taken all together they present a vivid picture of a quest, and of a marriage at the end: the marriage of aspiration and ardour to response and fulfilment.

Apart from the Aurobindonian 'satellites', many others too have essayed philosophical, mystical and devotional poetry. There was Ananda Acharya, whose *Snow Birds* (1919), *Usarika* (1923), and *Arctic Swallows* (1927) had a considerable vogue at one time and may still be read with interest. The sometime 'world teacher' J. Krishnamurti's *The Immortal Friend* (1928) contains mystic affirmations like—

Oh ! Thou art round the stone
That grinds the rice in the peaceful village
Amid songs and laughter.
Thou art the graven image
That men worship in temples,
With chants and solemn music.
Thou art the dead leaf
That lies torn on the dusty road. . .

My search is at an end.
In thee I behold all things.
I myself, am God.

Let me pass on now from the philosophical, devotional and mystic poets to those others who, although not unresponsive to the intimations of the Spirit, are generally content to sing of the aches and joys of Man set in an environment that is strange and familiar by turns, that is intriguing and reassuring, that is repulsive and fascinating, that is chaotic and polysymphonic. A very large number have been soliciting the Muse, perhaps sustained by the feeling expressed by Landor:

There is delight in singing, tho' none hear
Beside the singer.

Professors (not professors or teachers of literature alone), journalists, business magnates, soldiers, administrators, doctors, engineers, malaria specialists, nuclear scientists, even politicians—the Muse tempts them all. It is like marriage, everyone almost rushes into it, though everyone also knows that really happy marriages are few and far between. An editor once wrote to me, “An enormous number of people in India write poetry (in English), and they vary from the Yuvarajkumar of K. to boiler-makers in Asansol!” While admitting that of the masses of verse that reached him “at least 95 per cent of the material . . . (was) without merit . . . (being) of the June-Moon school of rhyming and burdened with sentimental bathos”, he also readily conceded: “I feel, however, that even for people to write bad poetry shows a striving towards the sensitive”. There is no dearth of aspirants to poetic honours, then; and there are not wanting magazines—including school and college magazines—that publish verse that is tolerably good. And if the worst should come to the worst, one might publish one’s own book of verse and distribute it free. And a book of verse may be a matter of no more than 8 or 16 pages! Without reducing the next few pages to a mere whirl of names and titles, I shall now refer to the work of a number of poets of yesterday and today.

The late Govinda Krishna Chettur published during his comparatively short life several volumes of poetry (*Sounds and Images*, 1921, *Gumataraya*, *The Temple Tank*, and *The Triumph of Love*, 1932), but his mature best was the sonnet-sequence, *The Shadow of God* (1935), which was in a way complementary to *The Triumph of Love*. The later sequence was written under the shadow of his mother’s death, and perhaps anticipated his own death in 1936. Other notes are blended, no doubt, but the elegiac predominates. Chettur’s mother passed away on 10 February 1934, although the astrologer had said “She will not die”, for Saturn was against the Moon in the Seventh House:

What cataclysm unforeseen, what wave
In the great firmament of time threw out
His certain calculations? Ere one day
Had ended, thou hadst gone thy pilgrim way!

Chettur could almost see the approach of Death, and now Death has arrived and life is extinct:

So this is death: to lie so still, so still,
Shrouded with cold and still...
For the mourner is no anodyne
But Time, compassionate drug of every ill.

Is this the end, the utter end of the dearly loved mother, the "bitter end of Hope and Charity?" The answer 'No' comes from the very compulsion of his anguish:

And we, to whom the light upon thy face
Was as a beacon-flare to all our aims,
We are the proof that this is *not* the end.

But the pain returns, the hurt seems permanent; nor sky nor earth can heal the wound. Life is but lingering death, for life has perforce to "make common cause with her unalterable enemy"; life is a miserable tale punctuated by loss and indignity, and foredoomed to extinction:

Grant us, O Lord, the wisdom here to see
Beyond this passionate futility.

Days pass, months pass, and one day is like another; the familiar sights and delights return, yet something has gone away for ever. A brooding melancholy settles for a time upon the poet; the antics of pitiless Death prey upon his brain, and he needs must conclude that Life is but "a round of sorrow and despair". But out of the dark of negation and despair come new streaks of light at last. Death's other Kingdom might be a hospitable place, after all! Yet the poet is not quite sure whether this is the mood of "philosophical ingratitude" or whether he is rather chastened in his sorrow, his mind being "upborne to thy new sphere". But it becomes a settled mood presently, and he is reconciled to the conundrum of life and death—that if one would conquer Death, one must first conquer Life. He is thus brave enough to say:

If Death should take me by the throat today,
And hold me up, and look me in the eyes...
I should but point to yonder bannered skies,
Where the great sun quick-flaming in his way

Pranks all the East in hues of Paradise,
And murmur "Strike!", and patient wait the blow...

In an early sonnet in the sequence, Chettur projects the bleak picture of clay-made man wallowing in the shadows and ending in dust; but after the ordeal of personal sorrow and suffering, he is able to glimpse another vision—that of Light and Beauty. Then comes the climactic cry of hunger for God, the final act of unquestioning surrender:

Smite me, O Lord, with Beauty till these eyes
Behold all Beauty as a part of Thee...
Unleash Thy tempests, and Thy torments loose—
Destroy me if Thou wilt: I shall but choose
With my last breath to yield my body's pride
Transfigured in Thy light and glorified.

Always, Chettur's mastery of his medium, the graces of his rhythm, the structural finish of his sonnets, the general richness of his articulation, have contributed to his success as a poet in English; but in these last sonnets he has added a spiritual dimension almost to his poetry, and this makes *The Shadow of God* his finest achievement in English verse.

A Ceylonese now domiciled in India, J. Vijayatunga the freelance journalist is also a genuine poet who uses the English language with sensitive understanding. In the Preface to his *Do Not Go Down, O Sun* (1946), Vijayatunga said: "These poems, written in the course of twenty years, and in different latitudes, now make full circle". Ceylon, Bengal, New York, London, India, Ceylon—and so, "full circle"! These are largely poems of memory:

I stirred dead fires, and behold
The ashes were still warm!
I stirred old memories
And oh, they stirred, and tried to speak!

There are vivid pictures of the 'Little Moor Girl' sitting on the step of the boutique backyard—of Lamps and Moths—of the Sepalika flower—of the 'Dark Santals' of Bengal—of the Girl with Plaits walking along Kingsway. Sheer nostalgia inspires

two poems; and there are poems on Karma and Samsara. Of the themes of his poems, Vijayatunga writes:

I sing of cool things—
Of water splashing on oil-smooth rocks,
Of water splashing on the lotus leaf,
Of morning-fresh grass,
Of ebony and ivory...

I sing of clean things—
Of cactus and aloe, and sun-bleached sand...
Of the touch of skin, when magnet-drawn,
Love seeks the beloved.

He has an eye for beauty—unexpected, unconventional beauty—and he loves all beautiful things; but he will not be rooted to one spot,—he moves on, he moves on, but he will remember:

Eyes, say farewell,
Carry your unspoken praise
To some other scene, some other face.

'The World of Tomorrow' is Vijayatunga's most sustained effort, and it is pointed with high seriousness. The lines are longer than usual with him, and have a meandering grace of movement; and their grave music is in tune with the noble urgency of the theme. He assures us that there is no need yet to despair, for the good life (the 'good' not the 'luxurious' life) is no archaic language but may be uttered and lived even today:

Be good and live!
Oh, yes, there still are men who say it as did the Christ,
And prove it to a world of scornful sceptics
That the somehow Good prevails and the somewhen Bad
Goes down the muddy stream where mud becomes soil
For flowery things: and that in Nature's alchemy the worst
Is bad to be bettered...

Individual man still carries within him the seed of future perfection, if only he wouldn't throw it away, like the base Indian who threw away the pearl "richer than all his tribe". Man today feels crushed by his seeming insignificance—he feels frightened—he

feels finished. But the human adventure is not ended. Life is worth living still. Hope beckons, Grace is unfailing; and 'little man' can exceed himself and grasp at the power and the glory that await him in tomorrow's world:

Man, be thrilled, and thrilled, be silent, and silent, pray.
Remember that behind all your chromium casements
A single flower petal can make your heart throb,
And the bleat of a forlorn lamb, and the look of a cradled child.
By these tokens are you *Man*, tremulous, but unafraid,
God-created, God-cared-for, inheritor from first to last,
Of the great fruits of Life, of the good things of Earth, of Today,
Of Tomorrow, when a saner reason shall prevail, and men
Shall share, not rob, cherish, not kill, and all the greater deeds
Shall count, be it by pen, or plough, by winged flight, or plodding feet,
As those which mute discords and make the Diverse, One,
Thus writing God's signature across Man.

To read impassioned verse that articulates such robust faith in a future is a tonic after a diet of decadent modernism that but laboriously pokes the peevish gutter and wails the hours away.

Like Vijayatunga the Ceylonese, two Goan poets—Joseph Furtado and Armando Menezes—have also contributed something distinctive to Indo-Anglian poetry. Goa was till a decade ago 'Portuguese India'—but part of India all the same—and Goan poets write in Konkani, Marathi, Portuguese or English, and many are bilingual. Many a Goan has had to seek his livelihood outside Goa, and so 'Exile' has become a constant theme of his poetry. Almost thirty years ago I spent a few days in Goa, for I had many of my students there; what an enchanting place it was—poetry almost seemed to lurk in the air. A feeling for place, persons and atmosphere seems natural to the Goan poet, and at his best he could be quite disarming. When Joseph Furtado's *A Goan Fiddler* appeared in 1927 with a Preface by Sir Edmund Gosse, the *Times Literary Supplement* said in the course of its review:

. . . the freshness, the ecstatic naivete of his feeling for life. . . . We often feel that he achieves spontaneously the attitude which Wordsworth had consciously to cultivate, while many of his verses express, not the ballad tradition, but the very spirit, at once lyrical and dramatic, familiar and evocative, of the old ballad-maker.

Of *The Desterrado* (1929), the *Tablet* wrote: "Something of the quality of Blake shines through these poems". Another book, *Songs in Exile* (1938), was followed in 1942 by *Selected Poems*, which has recently been reprinted by his son embodying the revisions made by the poet before his death in 1947.

Typical of Furtado's verse is 'A Fiddler':

A fiddler am I of fifty-and-three,
I go fiddling up and down
Both countryside and town;
The town swells they call me *Fiddle-de-dee*,
But the country folk are all kind to me...

I take my tunes from the birds on my way
And some from the winds that blow—
They are all the tunes I know...

Like a Herrick or a Davies, Furtado sings with an easy, apparently artless abandon, remembering things past, and praising the crosses and the shrines, the mango trees and the brahmin girls, the bulbuls' nests and the monsoon butterflies. In *Selected Poems*, the 125 pieces are arranged under 'Childhood Poems', 'Nature Poems', 'Love Poems', 'Humorous Poems', 'Poems of My Motherland', 'Reflective Poems' and 'De Profundis'. Furtado's songs, with their directness, integrity and deceptive facility, are a cry indeed from our current modes of verbal gymnastic in alliance with obscurity and sophistication. But there is an old world quality about Furtado's poems that may still appeal to us today. With his roots in his village, it is a wrench to him to leave it; it even an act of betrayal :

Like a thief I slunk away.
"Are you leaving us?"
Asked the palm-trees, bending low . . .
On my way I sold the house
I had loved so well.
"Judas! Judas!" croaked the crows,
"Sure to burn in hell!" . . .
Strange worlds before me spread,
My world was lost to me—
And Judas-like I fled.

The contrast between the country and the city is a daily memory and a constant stab of pain :

I now live in the city
But my heart's in the country
In the city I languish;
And a wild thorn or tree,
If I happen to see,
It thrills me with anguish.

Nostalgia, again, is the ruling sentiment in 'Long Years Ago' :

I knew a sweet maiden
With beautiful eyes,
Long years ago . . .
And never the sun rose,
And never the sun set,
Long years ago—
No matter what weather—
But found us together
And watched us grow . . .

You may revisit the places that were dear to boyhood, but how is one to recapture the old enchantment :

All day I ramble on the hills
Or linger pensive by the rills,
As in bygone years:
The birds about me sing as light,
The wild flowers too they blow as bright,
As in bygone years—
Why fill mine eyes with tears?

Notwithstanding his limited technical range, Furtado's plainsong simplicities and homespun humanities present a way of speech and a way of life that are disappearing fast under the irresistible impact of massive technological change.

The directness, naturalness and forcefulness characteristic of Furtado's verse are found also in many of the pieces included in R. V. Pandit's *The Tamarind Leaf* and *Voices of Peace* (1967), translated into English from the original Konkani by Thomas Gay. 'I'm a small man' is a long poem in which a villager—a VIP

(very insignificant person) that is the prototype of the Indian villager — describes his predicament:

I'm a small man,
A very small man,
One of the very least,
Here, at the world's end...
Half a million villages,
All on the hunger line.
And one small village is
The one where I belong...

But he could also be gorgeous and fancy-free, as in 'My Goa':

As a bridge bedecked art thou, my Goa.
On thy vermilion lips I see the red, red earth;
The dazzling white Dudhsagar Fall is the *moghra* chaplet in the knot
of thy hair;
The domes of the temples are thy diadem,
And all the churches are the cunning pattern of thy bodice.

Armando Menezes, who has recently retired after a meritorious career as Professor of English, is the author of a number of volumes of verse: *The Fund* (1923), *The Emigrant* (1933), *Chords and Discords* (1936), *Chaos and Dancing Star* (1940) and *The Ancestral Face* (1951). A more sophisticated poet than Furtado, Menezes too has an exile's sharpened sensibility. Life in the city disgusts him and he lashes at it:

There is no honesty in all this city?
But how to shun the lawyer, doctor, bori...
Or beggar with his tragi-comic story?
Rank liars all!

Menezes's odes are admirable in their structure and craftsmanship. These are the splendid opening stanzas of 'Ode to Laughter':

Hail protean Laughter! youngest-gotten brother
Of that prolific family of Tears
Whom, at one pangful birth, our Ancient Mother
Let loose upon the many-broken years—
Dark imps of pain, angels of grace above,
Brokers of understanding and love.

Oh, come to us in many a shape, and lift
 The smile and shrug of Horace; the hot rage
 Of Juvenal; yea, the Yahoo-snarl of Swift,
 The maddest saint of Reason; and the sage
 Deep deathless laugh of him who wrought the haughty
 And high romantic soul of Don Quixote...

It is obvious this is a scholar's muse, and Menezes is especially steeped in English poetry. Literary echoes are not uncommon, and these raise ripples of reminiscence. 'The Sweeper's Song', for example, recalls Thomas Hood's 'The Song of the Shirt', but it is much more than an imitation :

Sweep, sweep, sweep—
 And I cast in the gutter man's fever and flutter,
 And I sweep into my bin man's sanctity and sin—
 Sweep, sweep, sweep—
 And my dust is the dust that is gathered unto sleep.

Again, the conceit in the sonnet 'Gifts' cannot but recall Shelley's "One word is too often profaned . . ." and the magnificent pageantry of 'The Mighty Lover' is full of echoes from Rupert Brooke's famous poem. And 'The Train' is certainly reminiscent of Spender's 'The Express'. At his best, Menezes is an accomplished poet, idea and word, and inner and outer experience, all fusing into a harmony.

Humayun Kabir's *Poems* (1932) consisted mostly of renderings in prose or in "halting verse"—from his own Bengali. In his Preface he confessed that the poems "bear only too clearly the marks of early adolescence". Yet there is nowhere any desperate straining after effect. Reviewing the book in the *Hindu*, K. Swaminathan remarked that Kabir "has concentrated on meaning and has given us, not the outward forms, but the essential quality of poetry". The volume reappeared in 1944 as *Mahatma and Other Poems*, with the addition of the title piece 'Mahatma' owing its immediate inspiration to the 'Quit India' movement, and 'Rabindranath Tagore', written presumably on the eightieth birthday of the poet. The younger Kabir is the purer poet, as is only to be expected. A poem like 'Birth of Venus' is richly sensuous and climaxes towards the beautiful vision—

A deer in the forests of the mind, Maiden, you stood alone.

'Frustration' builds a convincing picture of the wastes of the mind that has been denied the nourishment of Love :

My heart is heavy with pain,
And the world is empty for lack of you...
The rain-soaked wind is charged with restlessness.
And the murmurs of the trees are full of moans.
Shadows deepen on the sunless sky.
Magic tears glimmer in my heart.

'Spectre' is equally evocative with a sustained vitality of utterance. But of course Kabir's muse is undoubtedly more at home in the presence of Beauty, as in the poem on the Taj. There are no specific exclusions, however, and so wonder, rapture, melancholy, despair, doubt, ecstasy, all visit Kabir's world, and the changing moods are faithfully reflected in the body of his poetry. At one moment Kabir writes, with the consciousness of adolescence, a poem entitled 'Doubts' as if recoiling from the briers of life, as if he were out of tune with Reality :

Upon this heaped-up evil we yet want to base
The haven of our dreams.

But some months later, the same Kabir writes lines that seem to be almost charged with mystical ecstasy :

You looked at me with your dark mysterious eyes
In whose depths I gazed in amazement mute
And saw spaces beyond, regions unexplored
And glimmering worlds, unfamiliar, strange...
For a moment I felt I was at one
With deep passion's impersonal elemental air
In a million hearts throughout the world.

The moment passes, felicity fades away; but it is surely something to have caught a glimpse of it—if only for a second, if only in a dream—and passed on the revelation to others.

The late P. Seshadri—who made his mark as a Professor of English at Banaras, Kanpur and Ajmer—published his narrative poem, *Bilhana*, in 1914. The poet Bilhana falls in love with his pupil, Yamini, who is Panchala's King. When the King comes to

know of their secret, he orders the execution of Bilhana, who now laments his fate :

Like long-lost knowledge speeding back
In sudden swelling flight, she fills my mind
With bliss intoxicant. The full-orbed moon
Swims not in greater glory up the heavens
Than she within my sight; her radiant youth
Is dower which goddesses may like to own
And love...

The reprieve comes at the last moment, and

as her eyes beheld
Her lover's palanquin now sway its course
Towards the palace-gates, she darted down
To meet her lord and all was endless joy,
And blessedness.

In his other volumes—*Sonnets* (1914), *Champak Leaves* (1923) and *Vanished Hours* (1925)—he is seen as a writer of sonnets, the emotion generally subdued and tranquillized and the craftsmanship competent rather than brilliant, as in the commendatory sonnets on Toru Dutt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Tolstoy. Perhaps the best of his sonnets was the one recalling the memory of his dead wife :

Which look of yours is graven on my breast?
Is it the one, when, with that gentle smile
Of yours, you hail'd me with a kindly zest
That evening? Or when we drove awhile
Beyond the town, in neighbour forest-shades,
You wandered at the mighty wrecks of time
Scattered about those hallowed, silent shades?
When bending on my latest book of rhyme
You wished to know each song? Or, when that night,
The full orb'd moon aglow upon your face,
You gazed with rapture from the terraced height
Upon the Ganges draped in dazzling rays?
Or when that morn you slowly said, 'farewell',
Struggling with varied thoughts which seemed to swell?

Among Seshadri's contemporaries, there were many professors of English literature—as if that amounted to an occupational

disease—who tried their hands at poetry, some with more success than others. There was Uma Maheswer, author of *Among the Silences* (1928), *Awakened India* (1930) and *Southern Idylls* (1939); he wrote also a playlet in verse on the Buddha and another, 'Sita in her Sorrows', based on *Uttara Ramayana*. Even at his best, Uma Maheswer was but a pedestrian poet, wedded for the most part to melancholy. There was B. N. Saletore, truly an autochthonous poet, who died when he was barely twenty-five. There was the indefatigable V. N. Bhushan, a genuine if unequal poet, who published several collections: *Silhouettes* (1928), *Moonbeams*, *Flute Tunes*, *Star Fires*, *Enchantments*, *Horizons*, *Footfalls*, and *The Far Ascent* (1948). He had a lively poetic sensibility, and a feeling for form and felicity of expression as in :

Onward, Eternal Pilgrim, Onward!
Through sunless days and starless nights
Across the arch of years
And over the bridge of life
In pursuit of the Purple Light...

Of Bhushan's work Vivian de Sola Pinto remarked that he "is a lyrical poet with real vision and originality and gives English poetic forms a new charm and freshness by adapting them to the expression of Indian imagination and mystical thought". Some of Bhushan's best lyrics appeared in his last collection, *The Far Ascent*, which also included 'Tagore-Anjali', a worthy tribute to the Gurudev. Another professor-poet, D. C. Datta, has many collections of poems and translations to his credit. He is a considerable linguist, and a scholarly poet; among his translations may be mentioned *Meghaduta* and the *Gita*, as also his renderings from Chandidas and Vidyapati. Baldoon Dhingra taught for a time before he joined the UNESCO, and his early collections—*Symphony of Love*, *Mountains* (1939) and *Comes Ever the Dawn* (1941)—contained several lyrics that revealed his mastery of form as well as diction :

Now are they eyesores, as you say,
At noontide, with those smoking tops:
Man works beneath, until he drops
Out of the world of wheels one day,
Factories are eyesores as you say . . .

(and this from 'The Hawk'):

From his soared haven of light, with heart elate,
 He cried God's challenge to the winds of fate,
 While from blue heaven, and life's unconquered song
 Death learns, for all the bitter doom he bears,
 He is not quite so strong.

In his more ambitious *Mountains*, Dhingra attempts a sweeping symbol-history of man, with a visionary projection of the future. In a later poem he says, "We have a share in something beyond our thought. . . and, after the stars go out, comes ever the Dawn".

A Professor of English, and a leading poet and novelist in Kannada, V. K. Gokak has also written poetry and criticism in English. *The Song of Life* (1947) and *In Life's Temple* (1965) contain his poems in English as well as his English renderings of some of his own Kannada poems. In his pursuit of purposive bilingualism, Gokak has cultivated a certain reticence, relegating poetic expression in English to a secondary place and giving primacy to poetic utterance in Kannada. To one who cannot read Kannada, it matters little whether what he reads was originally written in English or but translated into English from Kannada. Something is lost in translation, but the double discipline the author has imposed on himself—first writing the poem in Kannada and then translating it into English—may result in a poem that is both like and unlike the original. Tagore's English *Gitanjali* is the classical example here. Likewise, in writing in English in the first instance, a Kannada poet (like Tagore when he wrote *The Child*) may work under the shackles imposed by the genius of the adopted language, English. But when the attempt succeeds, this fusion of Indian sensibility and English poetic expression must give us something for which there can be no precise equivalent either in Kannada poetry or in the English poetry written by an Englishman. These generalisations must apply broadly to the Indo-English or Indo-Anglian poetry written in the different linguistic regions of India.

The principal merit of the poems included in Gokak's first volume is that they are hardly ever obscure, and they are characterised by an elevation of style and a seriousness of intention :

When I behold the white autumnal moon
 In a clear sky and climbing, climbing, climbing,
 Drifting o'er tree-tops and the spires of Oxford,
 Drifting as ever since the world began,
 I felt the mighty moon-stir in my mind . . .

All the thousand stars did rise
 Our love to consecrate
 And he who made the starry skies
 Will answer for our fate.

The 51 pieces in the more recent collection are grouped under 'Man and Nature', 'India', 'Meditations', 'Translations' and 'In Life's Temple'. Gokak is not the sort of poet who makes technique take the place of poetic substance and sensibility, nor one who allows a poem to degenerate into a puzzle. When feelings surge in him or when unexpected thoughts suddenly assail him, he is content to give expression to them in appropriate language and rhythm. Of 'English Words' he says :

Speech that came like leech-craft
 And killed us almost, bleeding us white!
 You bleached our souls soiled with impurities.
 You bathed our hearts amid tempestuous seas
 Of a purer, dearer, delight.

'English words' have indeed been 'tongues of fire' and 'winged seeds'—and the dross has been burnt away and rich new foliage has come forth. Of 'An Air Journey' (which I think I shared : we were flying together to Japan), Gokak writes impressionistically :

We violated the virgin air.
 We chased cloud camels and reindeer
 Quivering guests in a crystal palace
 Poised on jutting rocks of mist
 Amid simmering wavelets of milky seas . . .

'The Snake' is reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence's poem:

I killed a snake, a beautiful, live, warm snake,
 I could not help it.
 A lovely thing of God, it came my way.

The commemorative poems—on Rani of Jhansi, Gandhiji, Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Jawaharlal—are eloquently articulate, and the one on our late common friend, Shankar Gauda, concludes with the beautiful line :

“And still you are dear. And still you are near”.

The ‘Meditations’ section has an Aurobindonian orientation, and ‘The Mother’s Face’ has an epiphanic quality. The long poem ‘Visnagar’—part recapitulation, part reverie—winds up to the affirmation :

Moving through provinces, I know
Their living unity of heart.
They are one nation at the root,
Of one whole a part.

The last section, ‘In Life’s Temple’, is an abridged version of Gokak’s *Bala Deguladalli*, an epic composition giving a picture of variegated India and hinting at the integral life to come.

Numberless are the other practitioners who have in the main followed ‘tradition’, but no more than a bare mention of some of these can be made at the fag end of this chapter : Dhan Gopal Mukherji (*Rajani*, 1916, and *Sandhya*, 1917); N. V. Thadani (*The Triumph of Delhi*, 1916, and *Krishna’s Flute*, 1919); A. F. Kabardar (*The Silken Tassel*, 1918); Sir Nizamat Jung (*Sonnets*, 1918); S. S. L. Chordia (*Seeking*, 1925; *Chitor*, 1928); T. Basker (*Passing Clouds*, 1932); R. Appalaswami (*Songs and Lyrics*, 1935); R. A. Misra (*Life’s Fantasia*, 1938); S. R. Dongerkery (*The Ivory Tower*, 1943); Sabita Devi (*Phantasies*, 1953); Nilima Devi (*When the Moon Died*, 1944); Subho Tagore (*Rubble*, 1936, and *Flames of Passion*, 1944); Fredoon Kabraji (*A Minor Georgian’s Swan Song*, 1945); Cyril Modak (*Jawaharlal Nehru and Other Poems*, 1946); Lotika Ghose (*White Dawns Awakening*, 1950); Nanalal Dalpatram (*The Perennial Fruit*, 1953); K. S. Ramaswami Sastri (*A Vision of India*, 1954); Elsa Kazi (*Terrestrial and Celestial Echoes*, 1960); Burjor B. Paymaster (*The Last Farewell*, 1960), G. B. Ramachandra Rao (*Wings and Warbles*, 1965); Karan Singh (*Welcome, the Moonrise*, 1965); R. M. Challa (*Beauty and the*

Poet, 1969); and Gopal Singh (*The Unstruck Melody*, 1969). A random garner from some of the above titles might give a rough idea of the variety and richness of this body of verse. This from Basker's poem 'Dusk' :

The sunset lingers in the west,
Red as blood;
But death has culled you from our midst,
A half-blown bud.

Here is S. R. Dongerkery's 'The Toll of Love' with its utter simplicity in language and charming, disarming conceits :

I went on plundering Nature's store.
And made the moon, the stars, the sun
Their treasures at her feet to pour,
And yet her heart I had not won!

But when my bleeding heart I pcured
Before her eyes without a groan,
A speechless victory I scored
And she could hold no more her own.

And, for a contrast, here is R. A. Misra's 'The Modern Lover':

Wouldst thou be a lover, sad youth?
Then close thy Plato, open thy Ellis . . .
Blessed be the modern Prophets
Thrice welcome Freud, Ellis and Stopes
Who gave the bodied joy
Of love untamed . . .

And for yet another variation, here is Subho Tagore who presents man's fascination for woman's love as a siege of contraries :

I have been caught in the silken noose of your locks.
I cannot unwind its knots, try as I might it is tightened more
and more round my heart.
Death is in the coils of your tresses, as I try to escape from it,
Your cheeks burn me down.
There is death for me all over you . . .

The heady wine of woman's body has made me drunk. I know fatal
poison is mixed with it, yet I drain it to the dregs.

But when he is in a less bitter frame of mind, when the cynic gives place to the traditional lover, he talks in a very different strain :

My love is like sandalwood; rub it on your beauty;
its sweet perfume will fill the air.
My kisses are passionate like wild flowers! bathe yourself in them,
and be abandoned in sweet rapture.
My embraces are like flames with which you shall kindle
your heart's passionate ardour.

And in 'Polygamy' Cyril Modak elaborates a conceit on Beauty :

Is it polygamous O Beauty! say,
To love and woo
Each glimpse of you
Snapped gaily when Life's out on holiday?
The grace of floating swan or swaying pines,
Soft ferns that wave
Beside a cave,
The dew-prank't mesh of gossamer that shines!

On the other hand, to R. M. Challa 'Beauty' is truth as well as power, the truth of the poet's experience as also the power behind his poesy; and his hymn to Beauty is really the celebration of a great and overwhelming love :

And see how I embrace the universe
in thee! I string my speech to the music of
the spheres; I draw the circling planets into
my arms; I reach beyond the outer space
and bring the Milky Way into my mind ...

Oh touch me with thy hidden tenderness
and make me feel that beauty of thine and
poetry of mine are but united light
and flame of the candle of eternal love!

With Burjor Paymaster, there is a descent to disillusion, the touch being almost reminiscent of A. E. Housman :

When I was young and spruce and gay
My heart within me sang all day;
But, as youth and I did part,
'Twas not such fun
When one by one
They tore up the roots of my heart.

The whip-lash of satire is stinging in Karan Singh's 'Seminar', and we can easily recognise these familiar prototypical participants:

There sat the learned,
like rows of soda-water bottles
awaiting their turn to be drunk

And Gopal Singh lets us have a peep into the hell of sophisticated life in the metropolis :

And lo, freemen dance
(to the tunes of borrowed twists).
O, it's a rare chance
to brush your over-ripe thighs and cheeks
with another's spare-time wife,
and for your podgy sweetheart
to circumambulate round your son's haunches!
We're all true inheritors of the British Raj:
with our cockney cackles, pining for wifeless love,
mercantile hearts, and a rare sense of humour
(at another's cost!)
The stars, like a peasant's half-lit hut,
look on, in silent despair!

But the same Gopal Singh has also attempted, in his *The Man Who Never Died* (1969)—to tell anew in the contemporary idiom the familiar Gospel of Christ—the universal Christ, everybody's Christ. The quality of the verse may be indicated by a few lines:

The statue is forever present
in the stone: the artist only
takes away what conforms not to his vision . . .

But he said unto those that believe
that nothing dies in the realm of God—
neither seed, nor drop, nor dust, nor man.

Fancy, imagination, humour, sensuality, romance, conceit, adoration, cynicism, satire—almost the whole spectrum of poetic sensibility—may be seen represented in the garner.

The 'New' Poets

Since the end of World War II, there has been a visible stir everywhere—partly the rustle of a new hope, and partly the stutter of a new despair. A global war spread over several years is apt to liquidate a whole generation—the “middle” generation. And a new generation comes up with a striking individuality of its own, a sharpness in its features, an angularity in its gestures, a tone of defiance (or at least of nonconformity) in its speech, a gleam of hope in its eyes,—a new ardour perhaps, and even new rhythms and nuances and acerbities of speech. There is a ‘new’ poetry in England, in France, in the States,—and, not least, in India, and in ‘Indo-Anglia’. Such new poetry could be—it often is—the poetry of protest. It could be the poetry of escape. It might affect the nod of Guruhood, it might don the lineaments of Hippiedom. And the ‘new’ poetry could also be really the ‘future’ poetry and transcend protest and escape alike and become rather a new affirmation, a bold nectarean answer to the poison of the present—a glimpse of Paradise beyond Hell’s circles and Purgatory’s slopes.

‘New’ poetry, of course, has always been ‘modern’ poetry, even ‘modernist’ or ‘modn’ poetry : no poet ever deliberately wrote ‘ancient’ or ‘antique’ poetry—and even when he *seemed* to write such poetry (as Keats wrote the “ballad” ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’), he invariably charged it with a new note, a new urgency of utterance; and if he didn’t, or couldn’t, then was he no true poet. F. W. Bain’s Oriental tales *appeared* to be mere translations of old tales; but one looked closer, and found that the antique appearance was illusory, it was the soul of modernity and universality that was real—a universality that makes a poem or a tale essentially contemporaneous with all times and all climes. No true poet can escape tradition, for all our yesterdays are involved in the poet’s deeper consciousness; and no true poet can escape the

pressure of the present, for he is in it and of it, and the best he can do is to relate the immediate present to the living past and also—if possible, and if his vision is unfaltering and clear—to a future that is already in a process of becoming.

The Indo-Anglian poet is, no doubt, knotted in his particular and peculiar perplexity. An Indian, he strives for self-expression in English. But he is, for this reason alone, no more a slave of oddity than a man trying to fly (like the bird) in an aeroplane or his contriving or diving (like the fish) in a submarine. Or a man driving a car or pushing a bicycle instead of walking—or walking at all instead of shambling on all fours; or a man talking (even in his 'mother tongue'), instead of merely making sounds like an animal. And Indo-Anglian poetry is not quite so much of a rarity as it is too readily taken for granted. Several of the poets in the various regional languages—Balamani Amma, K. M. Panikkar, Umashankar Joshi, V. K. Gokak, P. S. Rege, B. S. Mardhekar, Arun Kolhatkar, Dilip Chitre, Abburi Ramakrishna Rao, 'Sri Sri', Srinivas Royaprol, Buddhadeva Bose, Sudhindra-nath Datta, Jibanananda Das, Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', A Srinivasa Raghavan, Amrita Pritam, Prabhjot Kaur, Narendra K. Sethi, for example—are efficiently bilingual. In the anthology, *Modern Indian Poetry*, edited by A. V. Rajeswara Rau, out of the 70 poets included, as many as 25 are either Indo-Anglian poets or poets with an adequate enough knowledge of English to translate into English verse their own original work in one of the regional languages. Again, in the anthology, *Modern Assamese Poetry*, edited by Hem Barua, 9 out of the 26 poets included in the volume are responsible for the English renderings from their own work. The ratio would be substantially the same in the other languages as well. Thus the filiations between English and the modern Indian languages are quite close, and purposive bilingualism is much more widespread than partisans are generally prepared to admit.

Nay more : all modern Indian poetry is sustained by the living waters of our racial tradition (the Vedas, the Upanishads, the two great epics, the stream of Vaishnava or Saiva devotional poetry, the adoration of Himavant and Kumari, of the Ganga and the Godavari, the treasure-house of Indian myth and legend, the memories of our racial or local history) and by the continuing

breezes from the West—which now means Europe as well as America. Once it was the message of the Cross, the fiction and poetry of the Romantics, and the dynamism of science and technology. More recently, it has been the gospel according to St. Marx and St. Freud, the fiction of Proust-Joyce-Woolf, the poetry of Pound-Yeats-Eliot, the drama of Brecht-Beckett-Pinter, and the challenges of the age of nuclear energy, space travel and moon-landing. As a reaction there was in India, in the nineteenth century, the first flush of romantic exuberance. In recent times, however, we have been witnessing realistic clinical explorations by the poet turned proletarian, psychologist, psycho-analyst, cybernetist, naxalite or Adamite primitive. There is a return to romance too, and there are the sensualists and the symbolists, and there are also the laureates of the Spirit. But, then, the poetry of the Spirit is as ancient as the Veda and as modern as the latest guided missile.

When we are dealing with so elusive a phenomenon as human life or poetic experience, it would be prudent and wise not to attach too much importance to any rigid chronology. When does the era of the 'new' poetry begin? In English literature, Hopkins the Victorian—who could be published only in 1918—was hailed as one of the 'modernists', on a par with Eliot and Pound. The later Tagore, like the later Yeats, was as modern as the newest of the new poets. In India, the political and economic uncertainties of the thirties led to some re-thinking on the part of the writers who came to be known as the "progressives" and the "proletarians", and a literature of protest was the result. Even otherwise, there were poets who were disillusioned enough about everything to make them turn away from romance to satire, from idealism to cynicism. Even some of those that had begun as 'traditionalists' were soon infected by the new movement, and started writing in a new style.

Among the earliest of the 'new' poets was Shahid Suhrawardy, who had his education at Oxford, taught English and produced plays at Moscow, and became Professor of Foreign Art in the Calcutta University. His *Essays in Verse* was published in 1937, the word 'essay' being used in the French sense. Suhrawardy disclaimed any "deep spiritual experience"; the source of his poems (as he wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy) was "sometimes... a wistful-

ness . . . a half-opened hope . . . a visual enchantment . . . but nothing more". The section, 'An Old Man's Songs', is in the Prufrockian manner in sentiment and rhythm. The 'Old Man' lazily pokes the stagnant pool of memory, and presently there is a little excitement which finds expression in unexpected conceits and images :

Beware, my love, beware,
Lest in your riotous hair
There might not be a dream of mine that sighs ——
Though you don't note the hunger in my eyes . . .

Bowed down I pick the litter of your charms:
Alms of a word,
Blessings of a glance,
Gestures thrown out with squandering ease.

We grow old, we grow old—certainly we grow old, counting the falling hairs, fingering the deepening wrinkles, casting the annual budget of follies and failures. Since there is no reversing the movement of time, why not accept the inevitable? But what is an 'Old Man' to do except look back longingly, lingeringly, despairingly! In 'At Tennis', the last of the Old Man's Songs, there is one final move to annul the passage of time :

I stretch torn hands to reach your piteous hands;
I seek through tattered space your ample eyes . . .

But no; he is down among the dead—or dying—and *she* has no use for him.

In the long poem, 'The Indian Tragedy', Suhrawardy stirs the backyard gutter of urban vulgarity and bathos and pathetic futility, and imitates the modernist techniques of allusiveness, clowning, multi-linguism and facetiousness to communicate his sense of nausea and disgust. And even the pose he adopts is a cross between Eliot and Edith Sitwell :

With hands thrust deep in my abysmal pockets
And watch the dwindling eyesight sink in madden'd sockets,
As you would say
From inch to inch.
(you never had a sense of metaphor,

Not having sat at Eliot's feet:
 Nor having clasped the hand of Edith Sitwell . . .)

What's left is not life but mere cerebation—muttering, perhaps, high architectural clichés, or breaking into a sigh or a sob or a spurt of hollow gaiety. Suhrawardy's shorter lyrics—'You will not Miss Me', for example—are far more reassuring after the Old Man's Songs, and poems like 'The Asoka Tree', 'I sat at your Hearth' and 'Moon in the Sky' are truly touched with beauty. And 'Prayer' has a moving elegiac quality :

O Lord, shower thy grace
 On him who in travail and in pain
 Bends low his pale sorrow-painted face
 On the image of her, with wistful memory
 Of the last-drunk bitter bowl
 Of her caresses' treachery,
 O Lord, have mercy on his soul

Another poet whose work was published in the thirties, Manjeri S. Isvaran had the misfortune to have his first book, *Saffron and Gold* (1932), reviewed with acerbity and a total lack of sympathy in a long review in the Literary Supplement of the *Hindu*. When a poet ventures to publish his poems, these in turn publish *him*! Thus writing poetry is telling secrets; it is almost exhibiting a wound! The reader, the reviewer, the critic should respect the revelation, and touch the wound, if he must, only with love. Was it a crime on Isvaran's part that he—an Indian—had tried to write poetry in English? Isvaran's next book, *Altar of Flowers* (1934), was published in England, and had a better press. And no wonder, for he showed that he could make poetry even out of what seemed in 'Fruit Bazar' to be no more than a catalogue :

Row and row,
 How they glow,
 The juicy jewels cold, ——
 Lemons and guavas gold,
 Pomegranates rubine,
 Bunches of grapes that shine
 Like dainty dew-globes dim,
 And oranges that glim
 Grey-green, the moon's dawn-flush,

Mottled pineapples lush,
 And plums like chubby cheek
 Of babies smooth and sleek,
 --some from distant Cashmere,
 Some from Nilgiris near,
 O, where the Broadway bustle seethes,
 A leafless Hesperides breathes!

But the old wound wouldn't heal easily, and so in his next volume, *Catguts* (1940), he counter-attacked with poisoned darts ("an obscure bug/Crawled out of its dirty rug"), and by this means helped the wound to settle into a scar. Other volumes followed, *Brief Orisons* (1941), *Penumbra* (1942), *The Fourth Avatar* (1946), *Rhapsody in Red* (1953) and *The Neem is a Lady* (1957). The poems of the forties and fifties were generally the products of melancholy, frustration and bitterness, and 'modernist' in their sentiment and articulation :

Let us not tarry, you and I,
 to touch and kindle feelings when they are dead;
 where men and women measure their years in yawns
 clothed in cobwebs of boredom spun of their bloated flesh and sins,
 carrying dead races, dead nations, dead worlds,
 and the carcasses of dead constellations in their breasts ...

Wife! why this desperate struggle to keep up a synthetic youth,
 having passed the milestone of mellow menopause?

But there was a retreat to Innocence from Experience in 'The Neem is a Lady' who, although separated from the Pippala, is rich in her memories,—

and she listens, all hushed, as she dreams on moonlit nights
 to the song of the dryades on her bridal day.

One other poet who moved, in the course of a few years, from one form of utterance to another was P. R. Kaikini. His *Flower Offerings* (1934) had the sub-title "Prose-Poems on Truth, Beauty and Nature", and it was followed by *Songs of a Wanderer: Prose Lyrics* (1936). The influence of Tagore was evident :

Yesterday, when my young heart went to bed, it was full of joy, life,
 love and hope.

But this morning, when I awoke from strange dreams, I found my heart was wound up with the restless shadows of a struggle within and the vaster darkness of a struggle without, blinded in a storm of blood and water.

The mood soon changed, and Kaikini, instead of singing of "joy and dynamic life", began to scream about "blood and war", and rhythmic prose gave place to free verse. *This Civilization* (1937), *Shanghai* (1939), *The Recruit* (1940), *The Snake in the Moon* (1942) and *Look on Undaunted* (1944) were the recordings of Kaikini's response to the changes on the Indian or world scene in the wake of the race's progress of the Nazis and the militarists and the rape of the masses everywhere. This poetry, wrote Michael Roberts, "looks out at the world of science, politics, and everyday affairs, and it expresses a passionate sense of right and wrong". A natural calamity like the Quetta earthquake of 1935, the sufferings of embattled Shanghai in 1937, the war that Hitler precipitated in 1939, the nadir of human fortunes in 1942—these were Kaikini's themes, and what he saw in this developing world situation was only disintegration and chaos :

Rivers of blood clotting and germ-infested
 germ-infested and clotting clotting
 Rivers and rivers of blood blood
 warm beating human blood rotting rotting ...
 Time was when wonder shone supreme in our eyes ...
 But alas! today shattered and broken we fall.

In the post-war *Poems of the Passionate East* (1947), more hopeful notes could be heard, for it looked as though the war-ravaged waste land was to be cultivated after all.

In the prefatory note to his *the night is heavy* (1943), Krishan Shungloo, then a student at Oxford, explained that the "irregular pace of the verse" was chosen deliberately, being "best suited to the violence of our time and the interpretation of my moods". There are 39 poems, numbered but not titled; no rhymes, no capital letters, no punctuation marks; no clutching at false hopes, no spouting forth of cheap sentiment; it is the moan of disillusion, naked and unashamed—

in courting life
 i have wedded despair ...

i too have rotted in flesh and spirit
crucified my love on a harlot's bed ...

fraulein i mean
men and women wearing the mask of life
the dead souls of our civilization ...

we are the god's jest
the cryptic joke
we doubt and have no answer ...

Unlike Krishan Shungloo, whose poetry was of one hue throughout, Adi K. Sett cultivated a muse draped in many colours. His poems were collected at last in *Rain in My Heart* (1954) which includes, besides the ambitious and well-sustained 'Manjallika', several shorter lyrics also. 'The Wayside Shrine' has been called "a beautiful parable". While the roadside god frowns when a rapacious headman, offering a rich repast, asks for sons and for the boon of a drought ("so that the peasants mortgage their fields to me"), the same god throbs with a smile when a poor peasant offers a withered flower and prays :

Can you not make fertile my patch of sod—
and green and gold with corn? ...
Will You grant me my greatest boon, God?
Yet when Spring bursts forth in its riot
of colours, flaming and bold, and the birds sing
their haunting songs, grant me too a human song
the song of my child ...

Sett's evocation of 'The Nautch Girl' is picturesque—

Her eyes are black onyx, lips full-blooded
with the juice of the betel, finger tips
dipped in henna ... she flits like a fairy
with the dance and song,
twists like a snake,
turns, twirls—loveliest of all
the lovely nauch girls—

'Threnody to Old Age', although vivid enough, lacks charity :

The young die young
loving life with its vernal
beauty. The old live beyond image

till they are fossilized into stone
by the wayside, with their mordant
memories of stances going backwards
and ever so desperately
clinging to their withered yesterdays.

We may now turn to the post-1947 period. For over a century, some verse in English has been appearing in Indian journals and verse collections too had been coming out in a steady, if thin, trickle. But when C. R. Mandy became the editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1947 and decided to publish some verse also in that widely circulated magazine, Indo-Anglian poetry suddenly acquired a new currency and even respectability. One gradually grew familiar with the names of Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Dom Moraes, K. Raghavendra Rao, R. L. Bartholomew, Leo Fredricks, Mary Erulkar, A. K. Ramanujan, V. D. Trivadi, Leela Dharmaraj, and a few others. Shaun Mandy wrote to me in 1958 (the year before he relinquished the editorship of the *Illustrated Weekly*) that, although much of what he received was utterly without merit and his mind had definitely eroded by reading masses of such bad verse, still some of his discoveries had definitely made good, and there was "always a chance of finding a genius round the corner". Apart from Dom Moraes, who gate-crashed into fame in 1958 by winning the Hawthornden Prize, others too—notably Nissim Ezekiel and P. Lal—have been growing wings of maturity and achieving an increasing mastery of language and metre. The Western influences are still there, but even more than the 'content', it is the manner of expression—which involves both the choice of language and the flow of rhythm—that is being adjusted and attuned to the temper of the new age. Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, perhaps also Allen Tate and Wallace Stevens, have taught our poets the importance of taking their art seriously. They have realized that easy writing cannot make good poetry. Neither mere imitation nor wanton angularity, neither frantic incoherence nor fabricated obscurity, can make words live or sing themselves out. The profession of poetry is a consecrated endeavour and an exacting discipline. It is to the credit of the 'new' poets that they are prepared to take their vocation seriously. For example, in the second number (1960) of *Writers Workshop*, a 'miscellany of creative

writing' edited by P. Lal and published from Calcutta, there was an interesting symposium on questions such as : Is the English language capable of expressing Indian imagery and tradition? Can real Indian poetry be written in English? In what sense is the poetry now written in English in India truly Indian? Sasthi Brata thought that poetry had outgrown the need to be pasted against a particular form, and that mid-twentieth-century poets really sought "to pluck the chords of universal man". Lal felt that there could be Indian motifs, responses, attitudes and trends—the images of rain, peacock and lotus, for example, and attitudes like renunciation, resignation and non-attachment. Deb Kumar Das said that, of the three languages available for tackling themes and traditions on "an all-India basis" with impartiality, his vote was for English; "Sanskrit is dead, Hindi is a lexicographer's fantasy"; and although English is 'alien', "it is at least a living language and can be shaped by creative minds, not by grammarians or linguistic experts". Anita Desai found "a marvellous elasticity and expressiveness" in the English language, and Pradip Sen hypothetically remarked : "If the English language is suitable to express the sentiments and feelings of the Jews 2,000 years ago, I do not see why it cannot express Indian imagery and tradition". It was nevertheless Lal who came out with the most positive—almost aggressively positive—affirmation :

Without trying to be facetious, I should like to suggest that only in English can real Indian poetry be written; any other poetry is likely to be Bengali-slanted or Gujarati-biased, and so on. Only Indian writing in English can hope to attain the 'Indian' flavour. I cannot imagine a Punjabi writing Bengali poetry, or a Maharashtrian writing Hindi poetry, but there are Tamilians, Bengalis, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Jews, Goans, Sikkimese — all Indians — writing in English on Indian themes for Indian readers.

Exceptions there have been (for example, Bendre whose mother-tongue is Marathi is one of the greatest of modern Kannada poets), but Lal is substantially right when he says that Indians from all over India have participated in the adventure of creative self-expression through English.

The debate is by no means ended. In an article in the *Quest*,

Jyotirmay Datta argued that, since true creative writing is possible only in a language that is spontaneous as well as genuine both to the writer and his audience, Indian creative writing in English is an impossibility. There is thus no case for Indo-Anglian writing, except the specious plea of historical accident or (with some writers) personal necessity. In his effective reply to Datta, Deb Kumar Das said that a creative writer should have the freedom to choose the language he wanted and to choose his milieu as well. The Indo-Anglian writer addressed himself to a scattered but all-India audience, and this carried its own implications. In more general terms, Das said :

The Indo-Anglian writer, in the sense of what he has to be rather than what he necessarily is at the moment, is a new faith in transition. He is the choice and the instrument of a phase of history which, in turn, is only a piece in the jigsaw of human events. What he *can* do: what he *can* say: what he *can* be: what he *can* achieve. These define him as no other facts or failings can. And on this is built hope, and commitment, and adventure...

The whole point about the Indo-Anglian phenomenon, surely, is that it is a dialect of the mind rather than of the tongue ... It is the focus of the mirror destinies in the Indian tradition, the classic Indian and the grafted Western; and, in the ultimate analysis, may prove to be more real than either.

But the use of language is important too, and Das himself felt that the Indo-Anglian writer should be more impetuous in his exploitation of the possibilities of English, and he must "evolve situations which highlight transcendence without loss of individual significance". Writing in Number 19 of the *Writers Workshop Miscellany*, Anita Seal also pleaded for a bolder and more imaginative use of the English language for prose and poetry alike :

... most of us who try to write in English in India are flattened by the English language. We are subjugated by its syntax, cooled by the luggage of its literature. . . . We need to kick at accepted syntax, at the tried and waistcoated correctness of the language...

She has let herself go, but we can certainly understand what she is driving at. Whether you write in Hindi or Tamil or English, make the language *live*—make it the living dialect of the tribe. And let this dialect of the tongue meet the new dialect of the mind

in a creative embrace so that a new literature may come into being. More recently, an entry on Indian Poetry in English in the *Concise Encyclopaedia of English and American Poets and Poetry* (1963) provoked P. Lal to send out a questionnaire to several working Indo-Anglian poets, and their replies have been published in the *Miscellany* of the Writers Workshop. The entire variegated spectrum from the defensive and tentative to the aggressive and positive is covered by these answers, but no new points have been raised or made. All this tremendous earnestness, exploration of ends and means, and confessional outspokenness is rather characteristic of the 'new' poets, both as individuals and as a loosely identifiable group. And this animated exercise in re-thinking and this vigorous throwing about of brains have in some measure succeeded in projecting the reality of Indo-Anglian literature on the national consciousness.

In his Introduction to the anthology of *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959), P. Lal dichotomized "the body of poetry-appreciating people" into the Aurobindonians who are at home in the poetry of the Spirit and the non-Aurobindonians who are unmoved by such poetry. (The dichotomy is unnecessary, for one can enjoy both the poetry of the Spirit and the poetry of the earth, both sacred and secular poetry, both the epics of the soul and the lyrics of everyday life.) In illustration of his thesis, Lal cited a passage from the very canto in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* in which K. D. Sethna, a learned and perceptive critic, had found "a thrilled cry of mystical insight bringing up image upon strange yet apt image of some hidden Heart of Hearts which in its many-toned unity carries all experience transfigured into bliss"—and Lal had affirmed that all that talk of the 'soul' left him cold; he could see nothing, there was nothing to hang on to! Next year, in his Introduction to Lal's *The Parrot's Death and Other Poems*, K. Raghavendra Rao dismissed with a snigger "writers like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo... (who) used the English language, not as creators, but as manipulators", but praised Lal for being "right in the great tradition". It was a pity that Lal, Rao and their 'Workshop' friends should have tried to turn their passing allergies into a manual of poetics and asserted that they were the only poets, and that theirs alone was the true poetry. Writing much later, Mokashi-Punekar remarks: "Raghavendra

Rao's classification of Aurobindonians and non-Aurobindonians was, I hope, not intended to be a philosophy but a situational necessity". On second thoughts, Lal seems to have modified his stand a good deal, and along with a few others (Anita Desai, Pradip Sen, Deb Kumar Das, Jai Ratan, Kewlian Seo and Ashis Gupta) he issued the following statement in December 1961 .

Sri Aurobindo happens to be our Milton, and Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Manmohan Ghose and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya our Romantic singing birds. They provide sufficient provocation to experiment afresh, set new standards, preserve what is vital in the tradition and give a definition to the needs of the present.

The "situational necessity" was that, even as Eliot and Read had rebelled against Milton and the Romantics, Lal and Rao had to raise the banner of revolt against *our* Milton and *our* Romantics. In their eight-point credo, Rao (and Lal) affirmed their "faith in a vital language", in the value of concreteness, in the full-time nature of the poet's vocation; also their dislike of propaganda and imitation and romanticism; and, finally, their preference for the "private voice" and the lyric form. On a later occasion, Lal reiterated his criteria as originality and experiment in word-craft, intensity and strength of feeling, clarity in thought-structure and sense of actuality—in other words freshness, sensibility, trained intelligence and vitality. In his Preface to Monika Varma's Poems, Nissim Ezekiel laid down his own criteria :

Good poetry is not always clear and lucid; nevertheless, the amateur poet ought to aim at clarity and lucidity. Concrete and relevant images are usually superior to vague immensities. Simple, disciplined forms, within which much freedom can be exercised, help the poet to discover what he feels, more than sprawling accumulation of lines. Rhyme and other devices may be discarded only if structural compensations and very special effects are provided instead. Development within a poem is a sign of maturity in the poet.

All this would no doubt make—and they do make—a viable poetic world; but there could still be—as, indeed, there are—other, more complex, more comprehensive poetic worlds also, and it is these that Lal and Rao and Ezekiel would ignore if they could. There is nothing in the 'credo' itself to set the Ganga or Yamuna

on fire. It is basically the sensible credo of all times. Whoever said that the poet should dole out a dead language or that poetry should traffic with propaganda? Or that a poet should aim at epic flights when he is obviously unequal to the task?

The most successful of the new poets, Dom Moraes has already published five volumes (*A Beginning*, 1957; *Poems*, 1960; *John Nobody*, 1965; *The Brass Serpent*, and *Poems: 1955-65*). Even as a boy he was passionately interested in poetry and in writing poetry, and for a time he played the sedulous ape to Eliot, Auden and Spender. He had his education at a Catholic Missionary School before going up to Oxford where his idea was (as he relates in his autobiography, *My Son's Father*) "to use the University, not let the University use me". His main responsibility was to his poetry, and he wished to use his time in Oxford "to polish and harden my tools, and extend my powers". He had had encounters with the poets—Ezekiel, Spender, Auden—and both at home and during the passage through adolescence he had seen and felt things that asked for transmutation into poetry. His first book, *A Beginning*, had a good press review (Edwin Muir reviewing it, in the *New statesman*). And the award of the Hawthornden Prize settled more or less the direction of his future. The blaze of sudden publicity had its disconcerting aspect too :

... my ego, stroked and fed, expanded, and made me forget that I had not in fact written anything for a considerable time; simultaneously, I knew in my bones that this was a dangerous thing to have happened. The atmosphere of youthful genius that was building up round me was not an atmosphere in which I could get back to my work...

Get back, however, he did, and four more volumes of poems have appeared since.

Several of Moraes's poems—and this is true of the earlier as well as later ones—have a confessional cast. They have grown out of intense moments of encounters with reality—what George Whalley would call "paradeigmatic events"—but they have been translated through "symbolic extrication" into finished poems purged of the taint of the merely subjective and cast on the moulds of universality. In other words, the poet must needs do the alchemic act that turns the personal into the universal, and

we can see Moraes doing it again and again, for example in 'Letter to My Mother' :

Your eyes are like mine.
 When I last looked in them
 I saw my whole country,
 A defeated dream
 Hiding itself in prayers,
 A population of corpses ...
 Sorrow has stopped your eye.
 Your dream is desolate.
 It calls me every day
 But I will not enter it . . .
 Forgive me my trespasses.

In a sense, it is 'Any Son to any Mother'. Always, almost always. Moraes's lyrics have a vibrant suggestiveness; the familiar is touched with the allusive light of romance, and the unusual is rendered intimate through understanding. A song like the following has a subtle design on the listener's ear and mind alike:

The gross sun squats above
 A valley full of shadows.
 The wizard plays his flute
 And lizards in green meadows
 And archers in pursuit
 Of unicorn and dove
 Grow numb and cannot move.

Or, as in the later poem 'Voices' :

In my lady's chamber
 Once I found a skull.
 It helped me to remember
 That she was beautiful.
 If I find the moral
 That is all my wish.
 Men have fetched up coral
 When they have trawled for fish.

'This Island' with its four parts—'The Burning', 'The Coming', 'The Conquest' and 'Afterwards'—is the most sustained of Dom's poetic flights, and it impresses by its urgency of motivation and

adequacy of articulation. It is a parable of the ultimate failure of even a 'successful' war :

It was not war but mutual defeat.
Our conquerors shrivelled in the island sun.

For a poet so young, he would appear to have swept the whole arc of experience quickly, and to have 'beyonded' the Lethe of surfeit and landed at the far shore :

the final word
Bequeathed by us, at the far side of
Experience, waits: there neither man nor bird
Settles, except with knowledge, or much love.

In 'The Children', the poet imagines that children who had seen their parents die dream of them as being alive till they wake up to face the horror again :

Nightly when foxes walk,
Owls fly, rats shriek, they wake
Through closed eyes, to islands
Furled in a blue silence:
When the brushed sun is docile
And the flushed mothers smile
And the tall fathers stay at home all day
and nobody can die.

But when the blue eyes open
The horrors happen.

Commenting on his own poem 'The Prophet', Dom says that "a prophet and a poet both work with intractable material, the prophet with people in relation to his visions, the poet with words in relation to his". A moment may come to either when "he can neither turn back nor travel on" :

I followed desert suns
Alone, these thirty years . . .
My shelter under rocks,
My visions in my eye . . .
Once these kept me happy.

Once—but now “I have aged”, and the difference to me! Even the ‘command performance’, the piece on a lunatic who imagines he is Hamlet the ‘melancholy prince’ and strangles a nurse in the asylum (taking her to be Ophelia), reveals Dom’s assurance as a poet. Whether it is a viperous pang of disillusion as in ‘Being Married’ or a cry of the lover’s faith as in ‘From Tibet’, whether it is the evocation of ‘Kanheri Caves’ and the futility of subsisting in bones or the rich symbolism of ‘A Man Dreaming’ or the nightmarish atmosphere of ‘Vivisection’, whether the theme is legendary and mythological or contemporaneous and clinical, Dom Moraes turns what he touches into finished art. Are verse craft and facility getting the better of content and inspiration? Are the bite, the edge, the fumes and the sparks of poetry giving place to slickness, prettiness, sugariness and the electronics of accomplished verse? “Critics have said nice things about the flow of my lines”, he wrote some years ago; “my ambition now is to break my lines and import a rougher texture to my poems”. Even as he has gone beyond the pastiche, he will go beyond the silkiness too—and arrive at a mature style that will not attract attention to itself. “To live alone, to mind the garden...to be the same gardener, daily expecting an angel”, Dom muses wistfully; but the angel will come, tomorrow if not today!

Nissim Ezekiel—English is his mother tongue, as it is Dom Moraes’s—has published five volumes of verse so far: *A Time to Change* (1951), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960) and *The Exact Name* (1965). He also edited for a time *Poetry India*. An artist who is willing to take pains, to cultivate reticence, to pursue the profession of poetry with a sense of commitment, Ezekiel’s poems are as a rule lucid—a merit these days—and are splendidly evocative and satisfyingly sensuous. In his first two volumes, persons and places, memories and situations, literary echoes and moments of vision, all inspired Ezekiel to poetic utterance. He was painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges, its stark ecstasies, its disturbing filiations with the mind. In his later poetry, however, there is revealed a more careful craftsmanship, a more marked restraint and a colder, a more conscious intellectuality, than in the first two volumes. There is a gain in quality and integrity, and he is able to achieve

conversational directness and ease without losing himself in discursiveness. Obscurity and mere angularity are avoided, and beauty and bareness of statement often go together. The discipline of rhyme and regular stanza form is not shirked, except where special effects are intended, as for example in 'Memo for a Venture':

Not power nor success
not popularity but principle,
a point of view, a passion
like Alexander's
and something of the saint,
from these come plenitude
and prodigality
in gestures of greatness.

In other poems there is bold yet apt phrasing, a verbal sting too when called for, occasionally even a touch of the frivolous or ludicrous (as in 'Very Indian Poem in Indian English'), and a general competence in craftsmanship. Although there are hints of sensuality in some of the poems, that is at least not served up as something nobly spiritual. There is a vague striving after wisdom—in the latest volume, there is even a pull towards philosophy—there are feeble attempts at prayer and there are intermittent throbs of frustration. Growing old is shedding illusions, and perhaps hugging new ones. Ezekiel would like us to think that he is wading through middle age, experiencing the anguish (in Yeats's words) of

The unfinished man and his pain
Brought face to face with his own clumsiness . . .

Youth's certitudes on the *hither* shore, mellowed age's unhurried stock-takings on the *other* shore; and, in between, the trying thirties and the tedious forties and fifties. In a sense, of course, it's man's destiny to be for ever evolving, and hence to be 'unfinished'. There is a movement, a growth; something is gained, but something is lost also. If the intellect acquires a sharper edge, something else—perhaps imagination, perhaps hope or self-confidence—suffers in consequence. Between the motion

and the act falls the shadow, and so poems like 'Urban' and 'Enterprise' become images of frustration:

It started as a pilgrimage,
Exalting minds and making all
The burdens light. The second stage
Explored but did not test the call.
The sun beat down to match our rage.

The pilgrimage has become a weary trek, and when the goal is reached,

We hardly knew why we were there.
The trip has darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to gather grace.

It may be described as a miniature *Ababasis*: fancy-fed, the goal is alluring; but the process of reaching it empties the victory of its glamour and glory. 'A Morning Walk' sees the poet wading through Bombay (it could of course be any Indian city), and it is a mortifying experience:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains.
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums.
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs.

Checkmated, defeated, deadened in sensibility, lost in the whorls of hell! Love fails too, and marriages cannot make good. "A certain happiness would be—to die". In Belial's words, "*that* must be our cure: To be no more." 'Existential commitment' could be a mockery too, for most of us are but the slaves of the city's unceasing drive and banality and futility. Cabined thus within the ramparts of urban disillusion, what hope, then, for man? Eliot's recipe is "humility . . . prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action"—in that order; Ezekiel's is "Prayer and poetry, poetry and prayer". And the cry is therefore wrung from the heart:

God grant me privacy ...
 God grant me certainty
 In kinship with the sky,
 Air, earth, fire, sea —
 And the fresh inward eye.

The recurring note in Ezekiel's recent poems is the hurt that urban civilization inflicts on modern man, dehumanizing him, and subjecting his verities to pollution and devaluation. What is offered is dead-sea fruit, what we confront is the Medusa-stare. Is there no remedy, then?

The pattern will remain, unless you break
 It with a sudden jerk ...

There is a tautness and austerity in Ezekiel's best verse, and although the thorn of irony pricks now and then, the total effect is cathartic.

The organizing spirit behind the Writers Workshop (Calcutta) and the enterprising editor of its *Miscellany*, P. Lal has been (since 1958, when the Workshop was founded) both an indefatigable poet and the rallying centre for many of the 'new' poets. *The Parrot's Death* (1960) carried K. Raghavendra Rao's high-pitched Introduction, offered "as an act of friendly loyalty". Among Lal's later publications are *Love's the First* (1963), *'Change!' They Said* (1966), *Draupadi and Jayadratha* (1967), and verse translations (or 'transcreations', as he prefers to call them) of the *Gita*, the *Isa Upanishad*, the *Dhammapada*, and selections from the Rig-Veda, Sanskrit Love Lyrics, and *Jap-Ji*. The "work in progress" is a verse rendering of the entire *Mahabharata*. Surely this is a formidable and almost frightening record for a period of little more than a decade.

Lal is undoubtedly a sensitive and accomplished lyrical poet. He has schooled himself and trained his ear by absorption in the best modern English and American poetry, and constantly exposing himself also to the humanising influence of Sanskrit classics. He is a romantic, although he is careful to avoid romantic excess. He isn't altogether allergic to the 'soul'—either the word or the reality behind it: "My green Soul . . .", "Benign sun to my soul . . .", "Soul is to cage/As love to foe

...” He has an eye for beauty, and even familiar things yield rich significance to him. In the sonnet, ‘The Simplest Love’, mood, language and imagery all fuse into a rounded revelation:

Look, on a golden rose the hunched bee
 exhibiting a pose as a cocoon,
 silent upon the incessant afternoon
 distils its summer share of ecstasy
 (the indeterminate turn of either knee
 suiting the night jaunt of a tipsy moon);
 and, all despair and drunk, drops half aswoon
 and with the summer drowns peacefully.

If the swinging earth could speak and move
 upon the gossamer insect's borrowed heart,
 and if two souls corroding worlds apart
 know meeting as the rose engulfs the bee,
 O, the stars would stop, and turn, and stop; and we
 devise the simplest means to simplest love.

‘Not dangerously, perhaps’ has an almost flawless lilt, and the parallelism between ‘man’ and ‘bee’, although but a conceit, is not unpleasing:

since man and bee alike
 Improve in terms of love,
 O let me roam this night,
 In your intemperate grove.

Again and again, Lal achieves the memorable phrase, the line that as it were sings itself out:

convulses the green continence of earth ...

And in the south wind's music
 The assonance of grief ...

In a world of footfalls
 Her silence is a lily ...

The ‘rose’ is a recurrent figure: “. . . as the rose engulfs the bee”; “if love/Speak roses, I will live”; “White rose in black hair ...”. Flowers, birds, fruit—held together, if not by a

Wordsworthian "natural piety", at least by "moral tenderness—keep the poet safely and sanely occupied. And so Lal progresses—like the bee towards the rose—faster yet faster, towards the rose world and the rose garden, and so on to the climactic preordained "encounter with God in a rose garden". Roses, roses, roses—roses and bees and parrots and apples—all the way; and the thorn and the sting and the rebuff and the rind notwithstanding, there is beauty also, and the bliss of beauty, and we could be fed with this beauty and drunk with this honey. this poetry.

Like Moraes and Ezekiel and Kamala Das, Lal is a confessional poet too, but one would like to think that with him the confessional is not—what it sometimes seems to be with the others—an attractive, protective or defiant cover to hide the nakedness of the self, but more often than not an engine of catharsis, a way of agonized self-knowledge. Lal's *Draupadi and Jayadratha* is an attempt to charge an old myth with a contemporaneous significance. After Arjuna makes Jayadratha prisoner, there is a meeting between him and Draupadi, and Lal has here tried—not without success—to underline the passion and the poetry of the confrontation. As regards Lal's heroic adventures in translation or 'transcreation', his aim seems to be readability rather than complete faithfulness to his originals. The *Veda*, the *Isa*, the *Gita*, the *Dhammapada* and *Jap-Ji* may be poetical, but they are more than poetry. With his almost uncanny feeling for words in the modern context and his infinite capacity for taking pains, Lal is pioneering in new directions and his work is worth watching. Two examples of his verse renderings may be given here, one from *The Golden Womb of the Sun* (from the Rig-Veda) and the other from *Jap-Ji* :

Like much riches, like light, like breath of life, like one's own son.
Like a milch-cow washed and shining, like fever in blazing wood,
Is Agni the Sun-god . . .

Patience the goldsmith
Firmness the furnace,
Discernment the anvil,
Knowledge the hammer:

Fear be the bellows.
 Penance the fire.
 Love be the crucible
 To receive the nectar.

And here are two lyrics from the *Subhashita-Ratna-Kosa*, in Lal's slick rendering :

The man I married is the man I loved
 on moonwet nights when the bowers
 of my virgin days were filled
 with the fragrance of jasmine flowers.
 And my virginal heart still longs
 for the days we spent by the river
 that ran from the Vindhya mountains, where
 we made love, for ever and for ever...

Love's a good archer,
 Skilled in his art —
 Leaves the body intact.
 Breaks the heart.

The title-piece, in R. de L. Furtado's *The Centre* (1955) was in obvious imitation of *Prufrock* :

The roaring boys come and go
 With a goddess or two in tow ...

Time to go slow. Time to forget
 All this and the dark intentions.
 Time also for twenty vacillations ...

Like Eliot, Furtado also summoned the garish prince, Vulgarity, with the incantation of his verse. Likewise, Eliot's Hippopotamus is matched feebly by Furtado's Zabú, the Bull. While many of the pieces in *The Centre* were thus derivatives, Furtado showed in poems like 'Mahabharata' that he could speak in his own individual voice, and this he did even better in *The Oleanders and Other Poems* (1960). 'City Lights' with its literary echoes is sharply evocative, and 'In Capharna-hum' succinctly re-enacts the miracle of Jairus' daughter. 'The Moment' rescues from the flux a dying—though not yet dead—spasm, the point of time when experience changes into

memory. And 'Locomotives' is unconventional and arresting in its imagery :

They are queens
Reckless
Blasting forth
Insatiable ...
When they stop
Panting
They rest
Like drowsy cows.

Pradip Sen (*And then the Sun*, 1960, and *Poems Old and New*, 1968) and Deb Kumar Das (*The Night Before us*, 1960 and *Through a Glass Darkly*, 1965) also reveal considerable competence in their verse, uniting idea, image and rhythm to admirable effect. A quick motion picture like Pradip Sen's 'The Arc' has an utter self-sufficiency that arises from its packed brevity :

A boy threw a stone
At the sky;

The sky became bird
And plummeted down;

The boy stooped
And picked up the bird,
The sky and the stone.

The Christian imagery of some of the poems involves them in whole spirals of meaning, and a poem like 'In Each of Us' acquires a haunting universal quality :

In each of us some aloneness strives
Towards oneness, yet being perverse
Often achieves the reverse.
In each of us
There is some Judas —
Who, in the Garden of Gethsemane,
Had his separate agony.

("Separate agony" clinches the tragedy of fallen man.)
Although Pradip can charge words with purpose,—although

some of his earlier poems ('Last Night We heard Carols' and 'Fingers in the Sky', for instance) make cunning use of musical modes like repetition and refrain,—he still warns us against putting our faith in words that are "pebbles worn smooth by use". But words could be bullets too—or hammer-blows, or packets of energy or healing radioisotopes!

Rather younger than Pradip and Lal and Furtado, Deb Kumar Das gives a distinctly cosmopolitan flavour to his gnarled and knotted verse. In defence of writing in a language that is not his mother tongue, Deb has recently remarked :

... new ideas of poetry are emerging which make the issue of 'language' far less relevant to judging the worth of poetry — why must one write in one's native language, for instance, if poetry is to be viewed as a McLuhanesque *pattern of words*, rather than a structure of meanings?

Deb has been one of Eliot's spiritual children too, but he has also been trying to find his own idiom and voice, to be himself, and no mere shadow of another. There is a nameless horror behind the simple jerky sentences of 'Counterspy': masterspy Ivan and counterspy Timoshenko cancelling out one another. 'Reunion' is a poetic cocktail of memory and satire:

We were all let us state friendless strangers
Narcissae of the Thames ...

'Kleptomaniac' is a snap of "the quick man with nervous fingers/Between tall mirrors in a department store"; for all his practised sleight of hand, he is caught at last, and there's only "sob and whine in the lost land/Between the two tall mirrors. . . ." In 'The Exile's Testament', Deb explores the consciousness of the man who can neither find happiness in India nor find peace of mind abroad:

Wherever I go, there goes India darkness:
Its clockwork nightmare: unquestioning death.
No sky I travel under can be empty
Of brooding vulture's tentative shadow.

He has also made a verse translation of the *Isa Upanishad*, perhaps an attempt to seek the "nameless clue to final act"!

In *Poems from the Fifties* (1965) by P. K. Saha, the most ambitious perhaps of the 30 pieces included is 'The Visitor's Dream', cast in the form of a dream sequence. The Visitor is half-fascinated by America and half-repelled by the "screeching tyres and tranquillisers". The lure of America is symbolized in the Girl, and the pull of the home country is likewise objectified in the Old Man. While the latter warns the Visitor:

Don't let yourself go emotionally over another country;
You have a past which you cannot throw away, for if you do,
The future will be like a tree without any soil for its roots,

the Visitor seeks a solution to his dilemma from the Girl:

Tell me, America, for I hope you will measure my madness differently,
Is it so strange that I should want to hold at bay
Sterile yesterday and unborn tomorrow?
Is it so strange that I should want to make the present
A cocoon in time and space?

In his 'Poet Turned Critic', Saha makes a point that is worth making:

Language once sparkled in sunlight
Cascading down deep emotions
In rainbow splendour ...

But now my flowing words
Are turned into icicles,
And even returning summer
Will only see slow, dripping prose
Watering a silent growth of cautious meaning.

The ease with which the words flow nevertheless hides a careful craftsmanship in the use of language and the management of rhythm. 'Paradox' and 'Good Men' are among the other poems that linger in the memory on account of their relaxed rhythm and insinuating comment ("Save us, O God, from good men!").

Shankar Mokashi-Punekar is an interesting figure among Indo-Anglian poets. He teaches English literature, he secured his Doctorate with a perceptive thesis on *The Later Phase in the Development of W. B. Yeats*, he has written appreciatively of Sarojini Naidu, of V. K. Gokak's Kannada and English

poetry, and of P. Lal's poems and 'transcreations'. His first book of poems, *The Captive* (1965), carried a Foreword from Sir Herbert Read with this prediction: "one day Mr. Mokashi's work will be known throughout the English-speaking world". This was like a red-rag to the dyspeptic critics, and so Mokashi has had to intervene with 'Sir Herbert Read, My Detractors and I', now included in *The Pretender* (1967):

My blood be on my own head, critic!
 Stab me if you would; but spill not the gory
 Blood on his wise, sad and hoary
 Head, already swathed in Beatrice's glory!
 I know all that analytic, parasitic, paralytic
 Patter of the half-grown literary critic ...

A swan on wing suddenly looked down, drawn
 By a familiar sound among ducks' vain cluck-clucking:
 He had heard the agonised cry of the ugly duckling;
 And cried back in sympathy: "Hey, you are a swan!
 You aren't earth-bound; fly here to where you belong!"

As a poet, Mokashi is curiously poised between the 'traditionalists' and the 'new' poets, between the sentimentalists and the intellectualists, and between the purists in language and the forayists into forbidden territory. In 'The Rejected Race', Mokashi attempts some daring speculation on the poet's predicament in the modern world:

We poets are a race
 Rejected by two worlds ...
 The thrill of mystic adolescence gone,
 We make this journey our profession.
 Like gipsies travelling in the no-man's-land
 Between Illusion and Experience,
 We gather wild herbs, flowers and roots,
 And bring them to the market-place
 With our eloquent quackery.

He does some plain speaking to 'The Intellectual':

No, no, you cannot hope, since that one hope
 That man is taught to cherish without fear,
 The one love without shame, the one toil without tear

You lost. You chose dead words' heady dope ...
 In a self-built semantic limbo you mistook
 Immobility for poise; lust for divine bliss;
 Tenterhooks for the wakeful anguish of soul ...
 Now thank yourself for the breach of protocol, —
 There where Beatrice might have placed a wreath and kiss
 All you got is — saddle-shaped thrombosis ...

In 'Birth of a Poem', Mokashi probes the great mystery of poetic creation :

A mind befogged by images
 Must face a world of fact;
 Though riddled in verbal cages
 Keep down its meaning tracked;
 Subsume all fruitless rages
 In a creative tact;
 And sun each word ...

Clearly, then, Mokashi doesn't spurn the intellectual element in poetry, and there are among his lyrics meditations, speculations and moralistic musings like 'Desire and Destiny', 'The Yeatsian Dark' ("it is not qualitative but existential"), and 'Snakes and Ladders'. In 'The Captive', a bird lives in confinement for many days :

No, — reality is not denied; it is dimmed.
 All seasons there are, and the bird has learnt
 To respond to them in faint heart-stirs ...

Then, one day, the window opens, the bird is free; but this freedom is very frightening at first, though presently the bird learns to dare this air unknown and dry,

yet better resilient under its wing
 As it flutters, flies, turns, wheels, ascends and cruises
 Into stillness.

This might be the paradigm of Slavery waking up to Freedom, whether this applies to an individual or a nation. Mokashi's wit and verbal sleight-of-hand are seen everywhere, for example in 'Eliot and Yeats':

Blessed are both; they praise in verse
Their inheritance of the common curse.

But sometimes, as in 'A Sonnet on Nietzschean Tragedy', the effect is not quite happy :

Be all yourself; make your life a dance
A trance; a stance; a circum circum stance.

In his ability to analyse states of mind and even in his unconventional use of language, Mokashi recalls Robert Browning, and they seem to share also the same robustness of outlook.

Mokashi's *The Cycle of Seasons* (1966) is an English metrical translation of Kalidasa's *Ritusamharam*. In an elaborate Introduction, Mokashi offers a vigorous defence of the nature-eroticism in Kalidasa's poem, and seeks its sanction in Tantra, and adds :

... Indian sublimations have nothing in common with the nature-refuge of Wordsworth, personal Platonism of Shelley, or the intellectually cooked-up evolutionary Beauty of Keats. It springs from a solid substratum and gains in strength from a collectively shared faith.

Although Mokashi's translation is of set purpose more literal than impressionable, at its best the verse rings authentic and true. Only a stanza or two can be quoted here :

The far-off woodland traveller has espied
A herd of gazelles on a stream's sandy side.
Ah, shy sweet faces and fear-trammelled eyes!
For women he sighs...

Trees of motley colours hem them around.
On their peaks Koel's joy-notes sound.
— Mountains make delight in every heart!
Glades of brush on curving slopes abound.

Prithish Nandy's *Early Poems, Of Gods and Olives* (1967), *On Either Side of Arrogance* (1968) and his "experiment in verse drama" *Rites for a Plebian Statue* (1969) give evidence of an enterprising and erratic talent. The typographical and punctuational aberrations are apt to sidetrack the authenticity

of the poet's moods and musings. Here is a sample from 'In Transit, Mind Seeks':

use mathematics
to solve problems of position/
location
and point in space
the calculus of
illogic love
: on
either side
of
arrogance
i draw the line

'Parts of a Fragmented Autobiography' is equally unconventional; 'icon three', for example, is a page of print divided into four quarters, Air/Fire/Water/Earth, and is sprayed with the ambience of sex; and 'He was of the same Evening, the Stars' is another—a different kind of—exercise in pyrotechnics, a page interesting to look at but baffling to the understanding. One almost feels like exclaiming, as Hamlet does after hearing Osric's circumlocutions, "Is't not possible to understand in another tongue?" The egregious E. E. Cummings has really a lot to answer for! And yet Prithvi Nandy, when he is not Cummingsing but is content to be himself, can write lines charged with passion and power as in :

close your eyes love
before this loneliness
becomes unloving in the end
and the dolphins arrive
with unfinished waves
and in the island
we see the open wound
that leads to total dementia ...

'Towards the Moment I Drunk', although surrealistic in its effect, has moments of blurred-light, and these add up to something. The numbering, the chameleonic change of pace, the sex images, the leap of distaste, the incipient ecstasy, all make a movement towards the flawed culmination of the experience of love—

it was the moonstruck goddess of the erotic, her
 breasts haut-boy controlled, her nipp'es torn out of
 shape, herod and i face to face met in your brute
 hippodrome.

In his *Rites for a Plebian Statue*, an ambitious experiment, Pritish Nandy tries in his own way to catch the reflection of old Indian myths concerning Ajatasatru and Priyadarshini in a contemporaneous mirror. But it is lyrical more than dramatic, and the play of words and ideas is more striking than the unfoldment of the theme. But here too there are Juggernaut constructions that merely tantalise the reader.

When A. K. Ramanujan's *The Striders* (1966) was published by the Oxford University Press and won further recognition as a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, he stabilised his position as one of the most talented of the 'new' poets. He has also Englished with great simplicity and force some of the *vachanas* from Kannada and some of the love lyrics from the *Kurunthohai* (*Fifteen Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology*, 1965). These latter have won praise from Tamil and English scholars alike, and it is no small achievement to have matched the old sophistication of romantic love to the current sophistication of linguistic finish :

What kin was your mother
 to mine? What was my father
 to yours anyway? And how
 did you and I meet ever?
 But our hearts are as red
 earth and pouring rain:
 mingled
 beyond parting.

In *The Striders*, Ramanujan summons from the hinterland of memory buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony, and turns them into disturbingly vivid poems. The mutilated beggar, the drowned woman,—they are caught in their contortions and misery, and they are there, like the denizens of Dante's hell. The images are unforgettable, but perhaps there isn't always the touch of compassion to redeem the doomed :

I have known .
that measly-looking man.
not very likeable ...

But welcome as a subject for a poem! Thus of the Rickshaw-wallah :

His arms and legs were wholly literate:
in green and in red,
the indelible
names of friends long-dead ...

The tattoo will stand, green, red,
when all else is gone ...

His more recent *Relations: Poems* (1972) is an even maturer achievement, and is something of a bridge spanning childhood and age, and India and America.

The 17 pieces included in Leslie de Noronha's *Poems* (1965) are a mingling of reverie and reminiscence :

this little ounce of bitterness, this memory,
This load that weighs a thousand tons, and yet
is rich, bitter-rich, because it is my life ...

There is much bitterness in these untitled poems. "Oh God, oh God, oh misbegotten One!" he arraigns the Almighty Himself; and tells whom it may concern, "You fool, there is no promised land ..." In the poem numbered 7, the poet thinks he sees "a man" everywhere, at a bull-fight, in the Trivoli gardens, at a Paris nightclub:

I touched him. He was not there. He fled, laughing, weeping.
Yet he was next to me. Where did he live? An hotel room.
I asked him who he was. He said, mockingly:
Can't you guess?
I am loneliness.

In a later poem, de Noronha says:

That I must harbour the silent chalice of self-knowledge.
Bitterly, profoundly,
My hatred a glorious requiem,
A hymn, a symphony ...

There is then hope that somewhen out of this tartarean dark will rise the dawn of a new day.

Of the poets who cultivate an extreme austerity in style, R. Parthasarathy is probably the most successful. Although widely published in magazines, there is only one collection, *The First Step: Poems, 1956-66*. Parthasarathy's best poems reveal an uncommon talent and a sensibility that deliberately puts shackles on itself. His most ambitious effort is 'Towards an Understanding of India', a poem in four sections, the first being 'The Bull as a Metaphor':

Observe the peninsula has the face
of a bull. Include the mountains
and you have the horns. The sea will do
for a row of bells or of marigolds.
How about the Pamir for a hump?
At this rate you'll have to look for the tail
in Russia. But here the bull is not
a hero. He is not killed for sport;
he ploughs the fields, feeds the people;
he is the beloved of Shiva, this Bull.

Out of 77 words, no less than 65 are monosyllabic—this is austerity indeed with a vengeance. It was during his visit to England that he felt the need for roots, but how is one to reach at them? One may grumble. "This is a country the sun rules", but finding one's inner poise is not easy. Sensitive, observant, truthful, the mind in unease, the muse most reticent—no wonder the poems are so few, but they are marble-images of integrity. One of the happiest of the shorter poems is 'Two Cheers for the Poet':

Words have eaten deep
Into my life. I am scarred
Forever. Poems fester
On my tongue. My teeth
Are fallen. I have sold
My larynx for the price
Of silence. The true poet
Suffers from aphasia.

Somedays it's a torture
Not to be able to write.

And I'd hate to drag words by the hair
 Into the sunlight of a poem.
 I pray that words be
 Available, ready for use.
 A poem shouldn't be
 Kept waiting at the door.

This duality seems to be Parthasarathy's predicament too!

Lawrence Bantleman's *Graffiti* (1962), *Man's Fall and Woman's Fallout* (1964) and *Kanchanjanga* (1967) bespeak an original poetic talent that is still trying to find its true strength. His 'Septuagesima' was a shrill impeachment of the Bomb-makers and Bomb-users :

Bless them who bleed their fellow men,
 Bless them who war by mood,
 Bless them who bathe their wounds again
 To venture into blood:
 And bless the ninth beatitude
 Son of the Building Rod —
 Render to Caesar and his good
 The essences of God ...

His ambitious symbolic poem *Kanchanjanga* is said to have "just happened ... written in three days". The title indicates that the Peak is the key symbol :

The mountain will be in me, on me
 And around me. I shall be
 The bearer of the mountain just as
 The mountain shall be the bearer of me.

Below *Kanchanjanga* is Darjeeling, and far, far distant is the sea. "The universe, society, and myself" might be the theme of the poem. The problem is one of fusing the three into a harmony, and that is not easy. Seeing India from a height is to have a total, but not a reassuring, picture of the country :

I hear
 The summoning of India
 To face the truth.
 There is some black rock. There some white.
 Some scarps with thin-blade edges

Shave the night.
 There is much ice.
 There is misunderstanding ...

Oh it is bitter weather in a bitter world ...

Wait in hope, then: the "too much cruelty" ... "too much pretence" ... "too much too much" ... all that must be endured: and, meantime, wait in hope:

I hear the birds cry "live",
 And from the foothills come the songs
 In praise of Shiv.
 Eternal all.
 One day the mountain will be sea again.
 One day the rock will turn to flower.
 One day the wind here will be waves on you.
 And that is all I wait for. That hour.

In G. S. Sharat Chandra's *Bharata Natyam Dancer* (1968). there is a satirical picture of the applauding audience:

and the people applauded
 because the ministers applauded ...
 when the minister, the mayor and the entertainment committee
 nodded their heads
 and it was one big nodding of heads
 wearing the white cap of the Congress Party.

Sharat Chandra's 'Abdul and Fatima' is a moving tale of a wayside coconut seller and his daughter. In 'Girl in Yorkville', the poet encounters someone who says she likes Gandhi's teachings, and he thinks it strange that Peace should thus walk "In the crowd/Searching for a place".

Stanley F. Rajiva (F. R. Stanley) has collected in his *The Permanent Element* (1968) 26 poems that had "grown out of a need to express myself and my sense of participation in the life of my time" Rajiva is not "intimidated" by the *a priori* assertion that Indians cannot possibly write poetry in the 'alien' English medium. Rajiva has faith in human values, and he trafficks neither in obscurity nor in verbal jugglery. His commemorative poems on Tagore, Roy Campbell and Pasternak.

convey emotion tempered by thought. The elegiac pieces are vibrant with feeling. Thus of the 'Dead Freedom-Fighter':

Somewhere a wife mourns her loss,
mother of his children whose clear laughter
he will no longer hear. Christ-like his body lies,
broken between thieves in a landscape of skulls ...

Of the 'Unknown Soldier':

Something has been lost here,
now and forever, and in our mortal ledger
the gain will not balance the loss.

In poems like 'Lazarus' and 'Ulysses', the past is reiterated in terms of the present. There is deep compassion behind 'Portrait' (of a dead prostitute) and 'On a Dead Beggar-Child'. On the other hand, 'Portrait of a Lady' is almost savagely bitter :

Now you are the lewd, insatiate bitch,
green with longing and desire;
now the tantalising witch,
the jealous cat, the shameless liar.

'Poem for a Nuclear Age' moans the despair of our time when man turns from God and diets on hate. Classical and Christian images enrich the suggestiveness of many a line in 'Poem for a Birthday':

I must explore the landscape
of those shores, and in the arms of Circe
be a beast in my desire. Like Judas I must
sell the Christ within me, like Peter
deny Him; and barter as Faustus did ...

The poems with a religious motivation—say, 'Images for Good Friday' and 'Fragment of a Longer Litany'—achieve effects with economy and pointedness of phrase :

Deliver us from the dragon of success,
the labyrinth of contentment, the bog of plenty;
deliver us Lord, from good and evil,
from the greater evil and the lesser good.

Altogether, an unpretentious but genuine poet, conscious of the humane values and the deathless verities.

The nine lyrics in Rakshat Puri's *Poems* (1969) are attempts to express an agonised sensibility that is aware of the precariousness of life in the fear-oppressed nuclear age :

In the melancholy winter of our dream
Doves fall shuffling flakes of snow
And prophets cry a nuclear crime ...

Puri is no "experimeter" in verse, but is content to suggest the present human condition of flux between a dead faith and an unborn hope for the future.

One of the most aggressively individualistic of the new poets is Kamala Das (Madhavikutty), who has poetry in her blood as it were, both her mother and grandfather being poets in Malayalam. Kamala Das's verse appeared in the *Indian P.E.N.* and other magazines before *Summer in Calcutta*, a collection of 50 poems, came out in 1965; it has since been followed by *A Dozen Poems* (1957). The title-piece in *Summer in Calcutta* scatters its fall-out of heat, sweat and weariness over the entire volume. Even the imagery painfully recurs. Summer heat, urban modes; vital heat, urban sophistication; the contrast between the desire and the spasm, the dream and the reality—Kamala Das explores this theatre of enervation, this vestibule of unresolved tensions. Calcutta (you might substitute any Indian city in summer) is the 'Continent of Circe' squeezed into little space, and one must expect to confront (in Nirad Chaudhuri's connotation of the terms) the "anodyne" of sex and the "Hindu acedia". Under the Indian sun, although sensuality lures irresistibly, yet it fails to satisfy; feeling and introspection but sound the depths of the oceanic sense of frustration; and the calm of fulfilment eludes for ever. Love is crucified in sex, and sex defiles itself and again and again. Life is a cruel mocking bird, like the Dance of the Eunuchs:

Long braids flying. dark eyes flashing. they danced and
They danced, oh. they danced till they bled ...
Some beat their drums; others beat their sorry breasts
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They

Were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from
Funeral pyres ...

Lip-love prattles like the bones in the anatomy laboratory, words
and feelings trip "idly over puddles of desire"; and love—where
is love?

Who can
Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love? The heart
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence ...

Summer and the 'city' have made cowards and freaks of us all!
In her confessional 'An Introduction', Kamala Das tells us
with disarming sang-froid why she prefers to write in English :

I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said.
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins.
Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone ...

This claim for autonomy really flows from the felt sovereignty
of her own individual existence. She is sinner, she is saint; she
is the beloved, she is the betrayed; she is always, and uniquely,
herself! Her distaste for words notwithstanding, they grow upon
her "like leaves on a tree"; they provide her almost with an
alibi, for she has stretched her "two-dimensional/Nudity on sheets
of weeklies, monthlies ... a sad sacrifice". She writes straight
on, for she won't

search for pretty words which
Dilute the truth, but write in haste, of
Everything perceived, and known, and loved ...

Nevertheless, something is kept back—the ultimate 'She' is
kept back from the reader. Whatever may be the truth about

the "still small voice" within, the speaking voice seems to have no use for calculation, tact or subterfuge. The images are icy, stony, steely, dark—"settle time like a paper weight" or "die with metallic sighs" or "the night, dark-cloaked like a procuress"—and are meant perhaps to insulate the true self from the surface life. While her sensibility seems to be obsessively pre-occupied with love and lust, it finds love invariably petering out into lust, and lust merely eating itself to the point of nausea :

his limbs like pale and
Carnivorous plants reaching
out for me ...

The neons wink, the harlots walk, swaying
Their wasted lips, the
Rich men dance with one another's wives and
Eke out a shabby,
Secret ecstasy, and, poor old men lie
On wet pavements and
Cough, cough their lungs out ...

And, is he female who
After love, smooths out the bedsheets with
Finicky hands and plucks
From pillows strands of hair?
... How well I can see him
After a murder, conscientiously
Tidy up the scene, wash
The bloodstains under
Faucet, bury the knife ...

This is hell, nor are we ever out of it in this summer of sophistication, and the hell is often reenacted in the closed atmosphere of the 'catholic confessional'. Sometimes the indictment comes in an even louder blast, as in 'Sepia' about "this sad-mouthed human race", or in 'The Snobs' about the race of "paltry creatures, utter snobs, who disowned our mothers. . . ." And here is the portrait of the man schooled in the refinement of cruelty :

Even now his
Killings are unintentional;
Each hurting word a stone that did not mean to
Kill, but killed all the same and each kindness

A snake that reared only to hiss,
But struck.

In 'Substitute', the reiteration of the words "it will be all right" has a telling effect, and in 'Conflagration' lust is pictured with a brutal realism. We have to turn to poems like 'Radha' for a change from this contagiously confessional mood.

There is no doubt Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglian poetry—a far cry indeed from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das's is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world. While giving the impression of writing in haste, she reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm—the words often pointed and envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly, alive. Her characteristic trick is to split phrases and meanings—even the infinitive—between two lines and this is surely symbolic of the fissured, or fractured, sensibility she wishes to communicate. Of course, the endless reiteration of such hurt, such disillusion, such cynicism, must sooner or later degenerate into a mannerism. But one hopes—and her exceptional talent offers the ground for such hope—she will outgrow this obsession in due course and find her way to a season less trying than summer and a world other than the 'unreal' city of the dreadful ghosts.

Monika Varma is another talented writer. The lyrics in her *Dragonflies Draw Flame* (1963) and other collections, her renderings in *A Bunch of Tagore Poems* and her metrical translation of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* (1968) reveal a growing sensitiveness to English speech and rhythm. In a poem entitled 'Recherche' she says :

This is the only way to write,
not to care a damn what anyone says.
Let the dog days come lolopping through the hours;
I shall wait.

Again, in 'No Title, No Name':

It is not the time and the place that matters
but the way you say it ...

How would you read Rimbaud? Monika gives a tip:

Read him when the wind raging speaks of death:
the sun-kissed deaths of the butterflies of may ...

What is the secret of life? What are we to make of Death?

The essence of living is beauty,
Grapes and wine may have a more subtle flavour
but the flavour of life is living ...
No, life is an endless giving,
and Death is the greatest giver of them all.

At least there is a saltish simplicity about these lines, and one hasn't to play the sleuth with elusive images and symbols.

Monika's most impressive achievement is the verse translation of *Gita Govinda*. Is it erotic poetry or symbolic drama? When the Gopis yearn for Krishna, isn't it a case of the seekers of the Divine being themselves sought by the Divine? Radha's separation from Krishna, her remembrance of her sweet-sad past with her lover, and the ecstasy of the reunion constitute the drama of *Gita Govinda*. Monika Varma rightly explains that the key to the 'divine comedy' lies in the phrase "loosened garments" (meaning, "outward attributes"). The bhakta should stand, bereft of all attributes, before the Lord, even as the beloved stands nude before her lover. The highly sensuous poetry of Jayadeva defies translation into English, but Monika has done her best, and (for a sample) the following passage from the climactic Book XII both recalls the original and sounds natural and forceful in English:

As they embraced, the terrible passionate
lila of Sri Krishna began;
the quiver and thrill of the senses
acts as a hindrance,
a slight impediment to the consummation of love,
just as eyelids are an impediment
when the eye seeks to look,
and look again and again at the beloved;
and as the lips seek for kisses,
and more and more of these,
speech is an impediment;
and at the final victory of passion,

at its final acclamation,
 even the deep-felt joy is an impediment;
 and yet all these impediments,
 these that act as barriers, and momentary bars,
 to the consummation of ultimate love
 of Sri Krishna,
 take one to the regions of unending joy.

There are other women poets too, whose work already shows promise, and perhaps signs of achievement as well. The title poem in Ira De's *The Hunt and Other Poems* (1963) is about a doe that was killed, then admired, then "stripped, hacked and cut" and served as a dish :

That day my child cried with doe eyes
 And the food on the plate was warm ash.

'Afterglow' contains these lines charged with a vague sadness :

Tonight was a saddened nothing
 And a moss-tongued friend did not talk
 Of all that was left unsung today.

There is Margaret Chatterjee, teacher of philosophy, whose collection of nine poems, *The Spring and the Spectacle* (1967), appeals as much to the mind as to the heart. Her 'Homage to Boris Pasternak' is worthy of the Master, and her 'Winter in Delhi' and 'Poem in Springtime' bespeak a trained sensibility. But it is in the title piece, 'The Spring and the Spectacle', that she strikes an individual note of her own :

You in your wisdom never pose the impossible question
 That has been my life,
 The task of isolating the dance
 From the dancer,
 The kernel from the fruit,
 The flame from the fire;
 Bear with me then while I confess
 The crowning paradox ...
 The splendour of the spectacle.

There is Tapati Mookerji, author of *The Golden Road to Samarkand* (1967), who has included in it translations from

Theri Gatha. The courtesan Ambapalli is converted to Buddhism, and says in her old age :

My hair was black as the bee,
its waves bound with art;
Today, time has frosted my hair,
But my Master's truth blazes in my heart ...

One of Tapati Mookerji's most moving poems is 'The Refugee':

Oh, where's sweetness fled?
Fled from one, who has kind friends.
A refugee, but no home? ...

How my eyes caressed daily
With daily resurrected love,
The known landscape, the familiar faces ...

O tell me then
Where sweetness flies
Under foreign skies
Among alien corn?

But she can also write humorous verse as in 'Bride Wanted'—the love song of the man who has won a bride through advertisement :

Oh come, live with me and be my lady louse.
My increment-gained bride ...

There is the precocious Tilottama Rajan, whose *Myth in a Metal Mirror* (1967) is sustained by this credo :

... if one's poetry is to have some force (and I hope that mine does) it is necessary to preserve or create a definite sense of individuality. Most often this comes from a persistent image or metaphor, from the use of shock tactics ... or from the introduction of techniques suggested by such popular industries as the film industry or advertising ... In my own case I might mention the dark sun ... the mirror, the camera which can turn anything into a negative, and the human eye which is (with the mind) the root of all subjectivism.

Hamlet, King Lear, Narcissus, the Labyrinth, the Trojan Horse—

how do these old-time myths appear to the modern mind—when reflected in a modern steel or metal mirror?

Shield of steel turning
Through a myth.

The artificial sun lies in the sky.

Shield of steel burning
Through a myth.

Turning, burning—"shock-tactics"? Clever and intriguing no doubt, there is as yet more steel than sensibility in this poetry; but as Tilottama's is a real and maturing talent, it may soon be able to come out of the self-forged steel-frame and breathe a fresher air.

Suniti Namjoshi's *Poems* (1967)—a collection of 18 lyrics—strikes often a dry, ironic, cynical note, as in 'Beauty and the Beast':

Beauty loved the ugly beast
And thinking 'twas a prince she'd wed,
Waited for his shape to change,
And found there were two beasts in bed.

In collaboration with Sarojini Namjoshi, Suniti has published *Poems of Govindagraj* (1968), renderings from Gadkari's original Marathi. Rosehn Alkazi's *Seventeen Poems* (1965) is the work of a writer who is quite at ease with English because it is as good as her mother tongue, "having been brought up by an Irish family in India and then finishing my schooling in England". Here is her vivid image of exasperation in the short poem 'Beggars':

Surrounded by the death-like ache around us
Their mute appeal resounds
Intolerable
Frayed fingers pound the ultimate barriers
Exposed
We retreat
Into the anguish of our defeat.

Sujatha Bala Subramaniam writes as one who has faith in the

future of Indo-Anglian poetry, and she affirms that "there can be no doubt regarding the Indian-ness of contemporary 'Indo-Anglian' writing". She has developed a clipped surgical style of writing, but her operations could be almost painless, as in the lines:

All is said, done.
But silence erupts
Brilliant, staccato sparks
Probing, rubber-clad surgeon's fingers.
Animal, vegetable or mineral?

Love once belonged, voids
The agonized counterpart.
The difference, to me — personalize
The score — rose and dust.
Let me die my own fool's death.

There are others too, two score or more, some collected in one or two volumes, but many uncollected yet but whose work has been appearing in magazines here and abroad: M. R. Bhagavan (*Poems*, 1964), O. P. Bhagat (*Another Planet*, 1967), M. P. Bhaskaran (*The Dancer and the Ring*, 1962), Sasthi Brata (*Eleven Poems*, 1960), Jibananda Das (*Banalata Sen*, 1962), Leela Dharmaraj (*Slum Silhouette*, 1966), Mary Erulkar (*This Strange Adventure*, 1947), M. C. Gabriel (*Poems*, 1967), Paul Jacob (*Sonnets*, 1967), Adil Jussawalla (*Land's End*, 1962), A. Madhavan (*Poems*, 1967), Keshav Malik (*The Lake Surface*, 1959 and *Rippled Shadow*, 1960), Rabindranath Menon (*Dasavatara*, 1967), Mohinder Monga (*Through the Night, Raptly*, 1966), Robert A. Perlono (*The Lamp is Low*, 1959), K. Raghavendra Rao (*Poems*, 1968), B. Rajan (*Monsoon*, 1945), Srinivas Royaprol (*Poems*, 1968), S. Santhi (*Lamplight in the Sun*, 1967), Narendra Kumar Sethi (*The World is Split*, 1960 and *Song-lines of a Day*, 1963), Krishna Srinivas (*Dance of Dust*, 1967), and several others like R. L. Bartholomew, Amaresh Datta, Keki N. Daruwalla, Krishna Gorowara, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (author of the nobly articulate long poem, *Bharatmata: A Prayer*), Sukanta Chaudhuri, K. S. Chari, Jayanta Mahapatra (who won a Poetry Award in 1970 for his 'The Report Card'), S. K. Chirimar and Gauri Deshpande. The list, of course, could be extended indefinitely, but I may as well stop here.

At the end of a long chapter, there is not space enough to discuss the work of the many poets enumerated above, but at least there can be no question, on a total view, about the vitality and variegated richness of the current output in Indo-Anglian poetry. Let me round off with illustrative extracts from some of the poems chosen at random. Here's Bhaskaran's confession to Gandhiji on 30 January 1960:

We take your name in vain — yet
 Guilt holds a door . . .
 Did you trust us? Or did you like God
 Take us closer to your heart the more we failed
 Sneered sinned and denied you? . . .
 On quivering lips we still take your name . . .

There is Sasthi Brata with his neat turn of phrase and feeling:

Soft lips and beauty
 Were all too rare to find.
 Yet I chanced across a woman
 Who even had a mind.

There is Rabindranath Menon with his dismal vision of the Tenth Avatar :

Tenth and last; the integers are exhausted.
 The cobalt bomb;
 a painless sword, with aplomb,
 may make the end a beginning,
 but shapes a beginning of the end.

And here is K. Raghavendra Rao's elegiac lines on those who died defending the motherland during the Indo-Pakistan conflict:

God! to die is decision enough,
 but to sew death to life is surest grief.
 And did you know that other trap of love,
 know other women, disguised as Mother, squirming
 their shining, treacherous limbs in Night's grove,
 sending your darkest guests to meanest worming?
 Was there ever in that surge of an invisible sea
 the slightest seed of this wounded, undying tree?

There is the copious Keshav Malik who claims that he is trying

to write with a smooth
 Flowing pen, whence thoughts were rain
 On paper, as from a mint, tin coins.

And there is Gieve Patel—a practising physician—with his
 obsessive preoccupation with disease and post-mortems :

It is startling to see how swiftly
 A man may be sliced
 From chin to prick,
 How easily the bones
 He has felt whole
 Under his chest
 For a sixty, seventy years
 May be snapped ...

Finally (and to end on a brighter note) there is S. Santhi picturing 'Efflorescence' with memorable brevity:

Somewhere a shaft
 Lets a principle
 Of rapture waft
 Out a soft ripple.

Light scatters in
 A petal prism:
 Time lingers in
 Perfumed charism.

In this and the preceding chapter, a large number of poets have been mentioned by name with the titles of their publications and illustrative quotations too wherever possible. For every poet mentioned here, there must be at least a score left out. The even limited approbation accorded to some poets acts as a spur to others, and this is how a climate favourable to intense and widespread creative activity comes to be established. Before a few poets can achieve outstanding success, a large number should first engage hopefully in the writing of poetry. Kamala Das does make a point when she says, "I feel that when a poet publishes a poem, only other poets read it with interest". Poets are a poet's crucial audience, and the wider this audience is, the more alert and responsive it is, the better it would be for poetry. The critics, the *sahridayas* and the mass of common readers

(in the Johnsonian sense) are important too, but appreciation by fellow poets can greatly help to sustain a poet in his vocation. The last two decades have shown that there is abundant talent that is struggling to find self-expression. And the harvest of the last few years is creditable enough to justify our looking forward to the future with renewed confidence and faith.

A future for India in the modern world of competitive technology, instantaneous global communication and human landings on the moon is in some measure linked up with the future of English in India; and the future of English in India, again, is inextricably bound with the future of Indo-Anglian poetry. To treat English as only a tool—a 'link language' or a 'library language'—is to make it less than even a tool; in course of time the link will be found missing, and people will be unable to use the big libraries that are today largely stocked with books in English. But there is no danger now that such a tragedy will overtake us. As we have seen in this and the previous chapter, many are the Indo-Anglian poets who have been able to fight their way to a distinct power of utterance compounded of accurate perception, intellectual vigour and mastery of the verbal and metrical medium. The consciousness of the verbal medium, where it doesn't degenerate into a mere play with words, semantic pyrotechnics or promiscuous image-hunting, and where it doesn't dispense with the need for emotional or intellectual content, has given to the poetry of the moderns a freshness, a crispness, an immediacy and a vitality that must—in course of time—charge even non-poetic writing and speech in English with the tremor and nervous potency of a living and growing language. On the other hand, in the Aurobindonian aesthetic of 'overhead poetry', there is actually a hint of vast new possibilities of poetic utterance in English. Not altogether 'new', perhaps; for, in a sense, it is but a harking back to the *mantra* of the Vedic times. Overhead aesthesis has been described as "an essential aesthesis . . . a fundamental and universal aesthesis" that puts Truth first,—though Beauty, Love, Delight, and Power come into the picture also. This perception and recordation of Truth is to be "a splendid discovery, a rapturous revelation", employing the inevitable word, achieving absolute significance through appropriately fashioned language and rhythm. A lyric like 'Rose

of God' seems fairly to approximate to such poetry, for it has an incantatory quality that almost defies analysis. But can such intensity be sustained over a poem of considerable magnitude—over an epic, in fact? *Savitri* was Sri Aurobindo's answer to the question. As we have seen in Chapter X, *Savitri* is an epic with a spiritual action and a cosmic comprehension. In Sri Krishnaprem's words:

Savitri ... is neither subjective fantasy nor yet mere philosophical thought, but vision and revelation of the actual inner structure of the Cosmos and of the pilgrim of life within its sphere — Bhu, Bhuv, Swar: the Stairway of the Worlds reveals itself to our gaze — worlds of Light above, worlds of Darkness beneath — and we see also ever-circling life ("kindled in measure and quenched in measure") ascending and descending that Stair under the calm unwinking gaze of the Cosmic Gods who shine forth now as of old Poetry is indeed the full manifestation of the Logos, and when, as here, it is no mere iridescence depending on some special standpoint, but the wondrous structure of the mighty Cosmos, the 'Adorned One', that is revealed, then in truth does it manifest in its full, its highest grandeur.

Such poetry can only be written either in the early days before the rise to power of self-conscious mind or when that particular cycle has run its course and life establishes itself once more in the unity beyond, this time with all the added range and power that has been gained during the reign of mind. It is an omen of the utmost significance and hope that in these years of darkness and despair such a poem as *Savitri* should have appeared.

It is high praise, and it comes from an Englishman, a former Professor of English, who gave up his 'career' and all worldly prospects to be able to live in the light of Krishna's love and follow the way of the *Gita*. It is true many readers feel, as once with Hopkins's 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*', that *Savitri* too is "like a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance". But when one reads the poem in a mood of absorbed imaginative attention and inner concentration, the great dragon—"the huge foreboding mind of Night"—will be seen to withdraw, and there will follow an exhilarating and transfiguring experience, *kāvyañubhava* as well as *yōgasādhana*. Before one wishes to dismiss Krishnaprem's opinion with a shrug or a snigger, one should give the whole poem a careful reading, exposing oneself willingly to its currents of manifold suggestion. Let us not in our

timidity be afraid of recognizing greatness where it undoubtedly resides; but whether we recognize it or not, its realized truth and incandescent beauty remain wholly unaffected by our own denials and uncertainties. But poetry of this *mantric* kind is rather more than poetry; it is also a means of Grace and a way of *sadhana* or realisation. As the years pass, *Savitri* is coming to be hailed the world over as a truly remarkable poetic testament characterised by sublimity of conception, opulence of imagery and spiritual potency. What is this symbolistic epic, after all, except vision and revelation, the apocalypse of the passage from darkness to light, from the present nightmare death-in-life to a life of fulfilment governed by sovereign Truth-Consciousness? And so the poem—the crest-jewel of modern Indian poetry—blazes forth the culminating assurance:

This earth shall stir with impulses sublime,
Humanity awake to deepest self,
Nature the hidden godhead recognise . . .
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.

Conclusion

From 1818—the year that saw the publication of Rammohan Roy's tract on 'Sati'—to the present day would be a stretch of 150 years, and we might perhaps push the earlier date a little farther back to 1801 when Venkata Boriah's dissertation on the Jains appeared, or even to the closing decades of the eighteenth century, for Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* was founded in Calcutta in 1780 and there was already a climate favourable to Indo-English writing. The effective presence of the British in India that made Indian writing in English possible as well as necessary was about half a century old (Plassey was fought in 1757), when enterprising Indians started writing in English. First, then, occurred the English or British presence in India, and Indo-English literature — comprising both Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian literature — was the result of that presence, and an inevitable result under the circumstances. Sundry Englishmen in India wrote on Indian themes since the time of Sir William Jones, and the historians Robert Orme and Alexander Dow, in the latter half of the eighteenth century; and not many decades later were witnessed the first sure beginnings of Indo-Anglian literature.

A dozen or more distinct languages and literatures flourish today on the Indian literary scene, and most of these are distributed on a broadly regional basis. There are, however, three exceptions — Sanskrit, Urdu and English. The Aryan conquest brought Sanskrit to India, perhaps three or four thousand years ago; the six centuries of Muslim rule led to the rise of Urdu, as an expression of a composite culture; and the two centuries of British rule made Indo-Anglian literature possible. Sanskrit is our classical language, and for Hindus it is also the language of their scriptures; Urdu has to some extent lost its importance after the creation of Pakistan, and is now rather more in evidence in North India than in the South; but English is almost uniformly — if also

thinly — distributed all over the country. Although it is the first language of only the Anglo-Indians, a microscopic minority, the people who know — and can speak and read — English as a second language form really the “dominant minority” in India. Thus the books in English published in India account for 50% of the total for *all* languages, and the English newspapers and magazines command a more impressive and influential circulation than the others. For all practical purposes, English is the all-India language, in indispensable use at national conferences or gatherings, whether official or non-official. The popular vogue of Hindi is of course much greater, at least in North India; but for administrative purposes, and in higher education and the higher judiciary, English still holds a paramount place. It would not be wide of the mark to say that Indo-Anglian literature has a substantial base today, and this base — notwithstanding periodical scares — seems likely to be strengthened rather than weakened as the years pass.

The point to remember is that, although Indo-Anglian literature is but a matter of recent history, Australian and Canadian literature too can hardly claim a longer history. Besides, these Commonwealth literatures in English are also more or less contemporaneous with the *modern* phase of the various regional literatures in India, having grown out of the same time-nexus and similar conditions of political and intellectual ferment. While Britain as a colonial power held sway, for periods long or short, over the countries that now form the Commonwealth, the English language and literature made possible, and indeed inevitable, the passage from colonialism to self-government, from ‘Empire’ to ‘Commonwealth’. It was not, after all, possible for people to read Shakespeare and Milton and Locke and Burke and Mill, to read about the Magna Charta and the evolution of the British Parliament, and yet acquiesce for long in British colonialism. Burke said that an Englishman was the unfittest person in the world to argue another Englishman into slavery. He had the situation in the American colonies in mind, and because his warning was not heeded in time, those New England Colonies revolted and broke away from British rule. The other ‘white’ colonies — Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa — one by one cast off

the badges of colonialism and became 'Dominions' before the beginning of the first world war. And the 'coloured' colonies and dependencies too — India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Malaysia, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and the rest — shed their colonialism and emerged independent after the second world war, some during the last 10 years. But most of these nations, following the lead of India, have chosen to remain within the Commonwealth.

One can perceive a rhythm — or a pattern — in the history of all those territories that have effected the difficult passage from colonial subjection to political independence, covering a period ranging from 100 to 200 or more years. First came the shock, the trauma of conquest, a stage of demoralization and mute acceptance of alien rule. Then came the period of slow awakening, the sense of hurt and shame and resentment, and also the desire to imitate the rulers and adopt their language, their manners, and even their religion. Then followed the slow stirrings of dissent and the rumbling salvos of revolt. Be the struggle long or short, the end of the dialogue or struggle was the coming of independence to the former colony. Call it self-government, *swaraj*, *uhuru*, it meant the substance of independence, and with it a new era began with high hopes, with grandiose plans, — only soon to be followed by giant disillusion.

Captivity, slavery, subordination are ugly, degrading, demoralizing things, and this applies to individuals as well as to whole peoples and nations. But the British conquest had also meant, in the long run, the new English education and renaissance in literature and culture. The problem before the Indians of a century ago was how to learn from the British, and from the West generally, without at the same time feeling resentful and humiliated. It soon became necessary to mount an offensive against the British bureaucracy in India; and, again, the question was how to conduct this campaign of dissent or organize revolt against authority without permitting the means to corrupt the ends. The freedom that our leaders from Rammohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi aspired or fought for — as may be inferred from several extracts in the course of the book and especially in the chapter, 'A Pageant of Prose' — was really the liberation of the heart from fear and hatred alike. It was tacitly understood and sometimes openly declared that, if our means were

vitiated, our ends — even should we achieve them — would be found to be other than what had been expected. The leader who was not very scrupulous about the means might still take the country to political freedom, but would find his moral strength impaired and hence unequal to the task of enthusing and leading his people to unity, progress and prosperity.

It was our misfortune that the political idealism of the twenties and early thirties could not be sustained later. The first taste of real power in 1937 — like the proverbial taste of the forbidden fruit — sharply divided the people, and this chasm but yawned more and more throughout the war. At last independence came in 1947, but it had to be at the cost of the partition of the country, the partition of the Punjab, and the partition of Bengal — making a grim mockery of the *Bande-mataram* song that millions had sung from countless platforms for about 40 years all over the subcontinent. It was a fissured and flawed freedom that came to us on 15 August 1947, preceded by the communal holocausts and followed by even bloodier massacres and the heartrending mass exodus of people across the frontiers. Independence was no doubt welcome, but there could be no cry of exultation or fanfare of rejoicing. As Umashankar Joshi the Gujarati poet sadly confessed,

Try as I might to bring cheer to my lips,
There is still no cheer in my heart.

And when Gandhiji was struck down, on 30 January 1948, on his way to prayer, the chalice of our national agony was indeed full.

Literature has been the means of giving form and utterance to the hopes and despairs, the enthusiasm and apathy, the thrill of joy and the stab of pain, in a nation's history as it moves from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence, and again from independence to the tasks of reconstruction involving further experiences of success and elation or futility and failure. In most Commonwealth countries, parallel to the movement from colonialism to freedom, there has been witnessed also the movement, at the cultural level, from imitation and immaturity to creative experimentation and conscious

adulthood. The benumbing shock of conquest, the return of consciousness, the new education, the period of slavish imitation, the stirrings of the literary renaissance, the re-assertion of the national genius, the emergence of a new literature, not only self-confident and rooted in the national tradition, but also dynamic and modern — such has been the zig-zag movement in literary and cultural history. Without denying the inherited tradition, the new writer has been able to grow wings of creative self-expression and is boldly careering towards the future. But English literature has continued to provide an impetus and an inspiration to writers, whether they write in English or in one of the indigenous languages. Commonwealth literature today is thus spearheaded by literature in English, and literature in the indigenous languages is also influenced by English literature and by Western literature accessible through translations in English. And while, on the one hand, Commonwealth literature has now achieved variety and opulence and almost a global proliferation, on the other hand, literature in English is not confined to the Commonwealth — there is American literature, for instance, with its great vitality and vogue, but that too is literature in English. English makes communication possible within a multilingual country like India; between the different Commonwealth countries, and between the Commonwealth and the rest of the world.

We have seen that the base for Indian writing in English is much wider and stronger today than at the time of independence. It is true literature is the creation of sundry gifted individuals. But the body, the environment, the atmosphere are necessary too, although the heart and the soul are all-important. Yet these cannot function independent of the body, nor the body independent of the environment. Thus even the “gifted writer” needs a language (*he* chooses it or *it* chooses him): he needs technical efficiency; he needs curiosity, intensity of feeling, and an attitude of commitment; and he needs an audience too, comprising *sahridayas*, reviewers, critics and a body of ‘common readers’ intelligently responsive to new literature. Not less important, he needs honest and enterprising editors and publishers for whom literature is much more than a trade or business, for unless an author gets his work published, it must for ever “waste its sweetness” in the stifling air of drawers or trunks.

During the last 20 years, and more especially during the last 10 years, the outlook for Indo-Anglian literature has become brighter than before. There are journals in English — the *Workshop Miscellany*, *Mother India*, *Poet*, *Dialogue*, *Transition*, *Levant*, *Contra* — that publish poetry and creative prose, and there are the literary pages in the papers and weekly magazines, besides serious critical journals like the *Miscellany*, the *Literary Criterion*, *Indian Literature*, the *Literary Half-Yearly*, the *Indian Journal of English Studies*, *Triveni*, *Quest* and several University Journals that publish reviews and critical articles. Book-reviewing, of course, is still very unsatisfactory — books are sometimes reviewed unconscionably late (indeed months or even years after their publication), or reviewed perfunctorily or cavalierly or with acerbity or an excess of ill-temper — but this applies to book-reviewing in the regional languages as well. On the other hand, some Indian publishers have shown enterprise of late, and even the paperback publishers seem to be thriving (and helping authors too to thrive).

Indian writing in English has now also begun to receive scholarly and critical attention in the Indian and foreign universities. It figures as a paper at the M.A. level in several universities in India, and courses in Indo-Anglian literature are given in many American and Commonwealth universities. Indian teachers of English literature have been publishing learned papers and critical monographs, not only on English and American authors, but even on Indo-Anglian writers. Professors like S. C. Sen Gupta and C. Narayana Menon have published authoritative studies of Shakespeare, Rajan has given us excellent monographs on Milton and Yeats, K. B. Vaid has written on Henry James's *Tales*, V. K. Chari on Whitman, M. K. Naik on Somerset Maugham and Raja Rao, and Saros Cowasji on Sean O'Casey and Mulk Raj Anand. Symposia on literary problems have been organized at the Mysore University, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (Simla), and other places, and these too have helped to give a tone to the critical climate in the country. An increasing mass of critical inquiry has been accumulating of late in India, partly because of the requirements of the Doctorate degree, partly stimulated by Smith-Mundt scholarships tenable in American universities, and partly also on account of the newly awakened

interest in Indian writing in English in all its aspects. Two volumes of critical essays on Indian writing in English — one edited by M. K. Naik, G. S. Amur and S. K. Desai and the other edited by Rameshwar Gupta, editor of the *Banasthali Patrika* — have recently come out and have helped to focus attention on this hitherto largely uncultivated field. It can now be said that a real critical climate is developing, and this must have a salutary effect on creative literature as well.

When discussing the work of Indo-Anglian writers, it is sometimes argued that several of them (especially the novelists and, of late, the autobiographers as well) are more interested in a foreign audience than in an audience in India. It is said that these writers, instead of presenting a true image of India, give the kind of image that the West (or particularly affluent America) is supposed to want or expect: cobras and sadhus and decadent Hindus and phoney intellectuals and corruption in high places and fantasy and superstition. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, for example, writes in *The Continent of Circe*:

The life, the mind, and the behaviour of Indians are so strange for the people of the West that if these are described in ordinary English, the books would be unintelligible to English-speaking readers. Most Indian writers solve this problem, not by choosing a genuine Indian subject and creating an adequate Western idiom to express it, but by selecting wholly artificial themes which the Western world takes to be Indian, and by dealing with them in the manner of contemporary Western writers. To put it briefly, they try to see their country and society in the way Englishmen or Americans do and write about India in the jargon of the same masters. The result is an inefficient imitation of the novels about India written by Western novelists.

This is partly true, but even in the West, writers are not unwilling to give readers what they want or expect — sex, for example, and perversion, and spy rings, and intrigue at the highest levels, and adolescent crime, and total permissiveness. It is true, again, that some writers prefer, for their own reasons, to live in England or in America, but English and American writers too have been known to prefer an 'alien' climate, finding it easier (for reasons of their own) to work in France or Italy or Majorca. It should not be difficult to say whether a novel is good or not, irrespective of the author's own motivation or place of domicile.

Again, the praise occasionally bestowed on Indo-Anglian writers by English critics and professors seems to disturb the equanimity of some of our critics, even as a red rag ruffles the poise of the bull. David McCutcheon, for example, ruefully records that Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* "has already been the subject of a Ph. D. thesis awarded by Professors Pinto, Spencer and White of Nottingham, Birmingham and Dublin, so it has apparently established itself in the canon of English literature". Later he remarks, "Success has been too easy, praise too lavish from English professors with imperial consciences". Dismiss Pinto and Spencer and White, for they are "professors with imperial consciences". A David, indeed, come to judgement! While the 'white' man has now relieved himself of his imperialist burden, it would appear David McCutcheon has taken it on and made himself the super-arbiter of taste with regard to Indian writing in English. But he should forgive others if they are not prepared to take him as seriously as he is evidently taking himself.

One salutary development is the growing interest of Indo-Anglian writers in the Indian literary and critical tradition. They were always aware of the European literary tradition, and the intelligent use of the English language itself involves a certain intimacy with English and American literature. What makes Indo-Anglian literature an *Indian* literature, and not just an overflow of English literature, is the equality of Indianness — in the choice of subject, in the texture of thought and play of sentiment, in the organisation of the material in terms of 'form' and in the creative use of language. It is hardly worth pointing out that Indianness is not meant to be "a substitute for discipline" or a deliberate lowering of standards. For example, an Indian writer may avoid Tragedy, whether Hellenic or Shakespearian, and prefer romantic comedies of the Kalidasian or late Shakespearian brand. African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara (not to mention Amos Tutola) have shown a greater boldness and resourcefulness in the use of English than Indian writers have done, except for G. V. Desani and (in a very different way) Raja Rao. But things are changing, and there has been abundant experimentation, especially in poetry. Leaving aside the solitary phenomenon of Sri Aurobindo (in his last phase of 'mantric' poetry), many of the 'new' poets too have

specialised in a modern style of writing with faith in a vital language and the value of concreteness, and a preference for the private voice and the lyric form. This is a kind of mini-skirt poetry, fashionable and tantalizing, sometimes fascinating, sometimes irritating, but generally arresting attention and provoking critical scrutiny.

It is the unique role of Indo-Anglian literature both to derive from and to promote an all-India consciousness. To put it in another way, we should expect Indian writing in English — rather than any of the regional literatures — to project a total vision of Mother India, interpreting her aspirations and hopes and recording her ardours and frustrations and partial achievements, not only before the outside world, but also before the diverse linguistic groups within the country, and thereby promote a sense of 'national identity', an ineffable feeling of oneness with the Mother, the Mother of her six hundred million children. It is perhaps cynical to talk of 'national identity' and of oneness with the Mother at a time when divisive forces have been let loose and linguistic and communal passions are raging all over the country. 'National identity' was for India a spiralling concept, ranging from the material to the spiritual. Geographical unity, racial intermingling over a large stretch of time, common memories of the past, a broad pattern of beliefs and customs all over the country, a common urge to move towards the new horizons of the future, all have been there, and are still there— however much the political fog may try to obscure them. But as Sri Aurobindo pointed out in an article in the *Bandematuram* sixty years ago, "the sap that keeps it (that is, our patriotism or involvement in our national identity) alive is the realisation of the motherhood of God in our country, the vision of the Mother, the perpetual contemplation, adoration and service of the Mother". And Gandhiji too said at about the same time (in his *Hind Swaraj*) that the ancient Hindus saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature, that India was one nation, and to bring this home to the people they established holy places in different parts of India "and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world". Our national epic, the *Ramayana*, is the epic of India; the *Mahabharata* is the veritable grammar of national liter-

ature, and even in Rajaji's abridged version in English, it has done a great deal to project a consciousness of 'national identity'. It is not necessary that a novel should, in geographical terms, comprehend the whole of India. The action may be located in one place (as in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Kabir's *Men and Rivers*, Narayan's *The Dark Room*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*) and yet it may create the impression that it could have happened almost anywhere in India. But novels like Anand's *Coolie* and Malgunkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* may immediately suggest the moving multiplicity of the life lived in the vast spaces of India. In K. M. Munshi's epic of ancient India, *Bhagvan Parashurama*, and in his *Tapasvini*, the epic of modern India, there are total projections of India, the richness of the detail being as impressive as the unmistakable unity of the whole. Post-independence literature in India is rather full of muffled voices or hysterical cries, and the average writer's world is filled too much with the irritations, excitements and frustrations of the moment. But there have been exceptions too. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Goddess Named Gold* is a call to fidelity and faith addressed to the new Indian nation. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a modern rendering of the old Bhasmasura myth, and carries a warning to our mighty men of steel that they are foredoomed to achieve only their own destruction. And Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* attempts a portrait of the perennial India which, being perennial, is also modern. In the *Mahabharata*, all roads lead to Kurukshetra; in *The Serpent and the Rope*, all roads likewise lead to Benares, the eternal city, on the banks of the holy river, Ganga. "India is not a country", says Raja Rao, "India is an idea, a metaphysic", and in his novel he almost persuades us that he is right. By making Benares the focus of his action as it were, and by equating the Ganga with India's life-stream, Raja Rao does succeed in realizing 'national identity' in a sense not possible to a novelist whose approach to the problem is made on the wheels of a political or economic ideology. Of this novel it may be certainly said that it is neither revivalist nor imitative of Western models; it is autochthonous, it is modern, and it does conjure up the many dimensions of India's national identity. Why, then, despair of the future? For if we do not deny the need for

roots, if we do not surrender wholly to the near views ignoring the remote vistas, and if we do not reject the Spirit in our excessive preoccupation with the weights and measures of the market place, then surely our sense of community with Indian and global humanity will suffer no obscuration, and our writers too will then be able to achieve complete fidelity to the Vision and Faculty Divine.

INTRODUCTION

A decade has passed since the previous edition (the second) was prepared for the press, and that was 10 years after the the publication of the first edition (1962). The seventies witnessed a burst of activity in Indian writing in English, as also mounting interest—here and abroad—in the subject. At the beginning of the decade, books annually published in India numbered 5429, and the English-reading public was 15 million, or 2.5% of the total population. The literates in all the languages put together being no more than 34%, the share of 2.5% for English was striking enough. India was then (and remains still) the third largest publisher of books in English, with only UK and USA ahead of her. Towards the close of the seventies, the number of books published in India in English rose to 7809, as against 2966 in Hindi and 1595 in Tamil, out of a total of 18,558. Again, in 1977, as many as 2892 English journals (including 87 dailies) were published in India, accounting for a circulation of 8.9 million, as against 8.7 million for Hindi and its 3736 journals.

These statistics are not unimpressive, though viewed in relation to India's over 650 million population, the figures are nothing to crow about. As for the reign of English in pluralistic India's linguistic and literary scene, the current supremacy of publishing in India can hardly be disputed. But out of a few hundred private publishers of English books, there are not many with a true missionary zeal or with the needed professional expertise. Here, as elsewhere, quantity is no substitute for quality, and yet even this hectic, if uncritical, exuberance of the publishing industry is welcome, for such vitality and versatility can in course of time father quality and excellence as well. Certainly, we have come far, far

from the days of Edmund Gosse who discovered Toru Dutt in "blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore". An Indian writing in English is no longer quite an exotic curiosity or aberration. Standards of book production, though seldom rivalling those of the affluent West, have clearly improved a good deal. It is broadly true, however, that publishers as a rule shy at creative writing, and prefer rather to sponsor quick-selling text-books and academic monographs (often UGC-subsidised) with a captive market. Ravi Dayal of OUP has gone so far as to declare (*Humanities Review*, Jan-March 1980, p. 8):

... no publisher has yet made his mark as a consistent connoisseur in other areas of writing like fiction and poetry, although a couple might emerge before long as patrons of the audacious, if slightly unreliable, bestseller.

Pressure publicity and buccaneer marketing sometimes push fiction with a splash of porno and other inferior new writing to a brief hour of scarlet eminence. But, speaking generally, talented Indian writers in English do manage to find a local or (less often) a foreign publisher, and reach an audience of their own. And this mass of writing—called variously 'Indo-Anglian', 'Indo-English', 'Indian English', 'Indian writing in English (IWE)'—is being increasingly recognised as one of the dozen or more authentic voices of India. What was at one time a tool for the leaders of the Indian renaissance (Rammohun Roy, Rajnarain Bose, and those that followed them) to rouse the prostrate nation to register its awakening self-respect and presently to protest against the evil of foreign domination has now grown, after a series of vicissitudes in our national history, into a creative *akshay pātra*, *amuda surabhi*, chalice of nourishment, generating literature in all its richness and manifoldness.

"Why English?" The question still pops up periodically, and can be only met by "Why not?" Admittedly, the mother tongue or regional language, is the primary medium, but English continues as the essential second language, useful alike for inter-State and international communication. What was once alien, and till 1947 a fact of colonial imposition, has now become a necessary ingredient of our intellectual and cultural life. As Braj B. Kachru remarks in his essay 'The Indianness of Indian English' (*Word*, Dec. 1965, pp. 408-9):

In India the English language has blended itself with the cultural and social complex of the country and has become, as Raja Rao says, the language of the 'intellectual make up' of Indians. It is the only language, except perhaps Sanskrit, which has been retained and used by Indian intellectuals in spite of political pressures and regional language loyalty. In certain ways the use of English as a link-language (and the growth of Indian English) has for the first time created a Pan-India literature) except, of course, the earlier use of Sanskrit) which symbolises the cultural and socio-political aspirations of Indians.

It doubtless follows that such acculturation (or Indianisation), and this again with the inevitable minor regional variations, must as a law of nature create a wedge or distance between Queen's English and Indian English, and again between these and other varieties like American English, Canadian English, Australian English, New Zealand English, Caribbean English and African English. And yet there can be a GCM of shared heritage mutually intelligible and inviting fruitful critical appreciation. In the result, 'World Literature in English' is becoming a reality of the culture of our 'Global Village', and Indian writing in English becomes a distinct facet of this emerging phenomenon. An anthology like Bruce King's *Literature of the World in English* (London, 1974) and a bi-annual magazine like *Kunapipi*, edited by Anna Rutherford of the University of Aarhus (Denmark) that is devoted to new writing in English anywhere, are pointers to the progressive global proliferation of English, English writing, and English studies.

If old prejudices die hard, new enthusiasms can sometimes blur one's judgement. It is good that Indian writing in English is now cultivated in our universities as an 'academic discipline', though rightly only as an integral part of English literature studies. The subject figures at BA and MA, and research students too are attracted to it as to a virgin field. But if it should come to mean an ignorance of English literature or of Indian literature in our own regional languages, that would be a tragedy indeed. But English as a link-language, and Indo-Anglian literature as a link-literature, have vast potentialities as forces of national integration. Indian creative writing in English now qualifies for the Sahitya Akademi's annual awards, and also for the newly instituted Rajaji Memorial awards. It is symptomatic, again, that the number of scholarly journals in this field—many of them university-based—

should be on the increase. In addition to the journals listed earlier (Chapter XXVII, p. 696), several others are now in the field: the Aligarh, Osmania, Kakatiya, Rajasthan, Banasthali and Calicut Journals of English Studies, and besides, *Vagarnya* (New Delhi), *Journal of Indian Writing in English* or JIWE (Gulbarga), *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (Burla), *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics* (Quilon), *Littcrit* (Trivandrum), *Chandrabhaga* (Cuttack), *Indian Scholar* (Raipur), *Tenor* (Hyderabad), *Literary Endeavour* (Anantapur), *Cygnus* (Lucknow) and *Commonwealth Quarterly* (Mysore). There are more of them too, but precariousness alas! is the law of their existence. Nevertheless, on a cumulative view, such journals do afford opportunities for review, comment and discussion, and this is something to be thankful for. What most of these journals seem to suffer from is the lack of editorial professionalism (for example, contributions being passed by two referees before acceptance for publication); besides, an insistence on good printing and get-up, regularity in appearance, stringent standards of reviewing, and the forging of purposive links with similar journals whether in India or outside, will help to raise the tone of these journals, and create a climate favourable to Indian creative and critical writing in English.

Notwithstanding the truth of Ravi Dayal's finding that we have no "consistent connoisseur" of creative writing (poetry, fiction) in English, it is proper to acknowledge what some publishers (amateur or professional) have been able to do in spite of everything. There is the phenomenon of P. Lal's 'Writers Workshop' publications, a bewildering array of titles comprising poetry, drama, fiction, criticism, 'transcreation', anthology, totalling over 500, each volume sari-clad in divers attractive colours. More recently, WW has also been releasing LP records and pre-recorded cassettes of readings by several authors. Among ventures by the professional publishers, OUP's 'Three Crowns', Orient Longman's 'Sangam Books', Sterling Paperbacks, Orient Paperbacks, Arnold-Heinemann's Indian Poetry Series, Vikas's Library of Modern Indian Writing, and New Poetry from Clearing House and Newground (Bombay), all these deserve mention.

The nagging question still remains with many, like an insidious worm within, whether it is right for an Indian to attempt creative writing in English, whether such writing can ever really attain the heights of fulfilment, and whether in fact IWE by its very nature

isn't doomed to an early decline and collapse. After all, it is argued, the urge to write in English is "more intellectual than one from the innermost fibres of one's being". Whether one is too timid or too audacious in the use of English, either way it becomes an exercise in futility. And shackled to such a dubious vehicle of expression, "the creative imagination becomes crippled". Probing this problem, Arjya Sircar writes (*Commonwealth Quarterly*, Sept. 1981, p. 16) that, for the 'Big Three' (Anand, Narayan, Raja Rao), "the English language has been more a foe than a friend", and adds: "R. K. Narayan is perhaps the severest warning of how a potentially major talent may be reduced to a minor one if one chooses to speak in a borrowed voice".

If this borrowed medium is inadequate even for prose fiction, how about poetry whose demands can be far more ineluctable? Meena Alexander, a practising Indo-Anglian poet, affirms that in trying to make poetry with English one is caught between the 'terror of babble' and the 'terror of nonsense', and one is reduced in consequence to "the use of a language that in its very being cringes from actuality" (*JIWE*, July 1977, p. 1). Spatially, "English in India is a nowhere language", and unless it can transform itself in the Indian climate, it must prove a poor instrument for us. Politically too, the offensive is repeatedly mounted against the uneasy reign of English as an alternative official language of the Indian Union and as the language of our higher learning and judiciary. No wonder Uma Parameshwaran, in her *A Study of Representative Indo-Anglian Novelists* (1974), concludes mournfully: "I set AD 2000 as the dirge-date for Indo-Anglian literature".

But these gloomy prognostications are but part of the story, for Reality is often other than Appearance. Officially, English is on the retreat; but, as the statistics given earlier indicate, the steady expansion of English in India seems to be nearer the truth. The current rush to 'English medium' schools even at the primary and nursery stages almost makes nonsense of official policies and claims. English more or less holds its own in the Indian 'university system', and the bulk of university as also of Government publications is still in English. And books in English get prominently displayed in Book Fairs, railway and airport bookstalls, and urban bookshops.

Nor is it necessary to take too gloomy a view of the intractable-

lity of English in the Indian climate. When an Indian writer of fiction uses a learnt second language like English, he is actually recording a kind of half-conscious translation (from mother tongue into English) that has taken place in the mind. Most of our writers are bi-lingual, some equally proficient in English and the mother tongue, and some more in one than in the other. The background and the situations are usually Indian, but the characters may often be drawn from bilingual milieus. The need for expressing the values, verities and heart-beats of one culture in the language of another poses its own problems, and there is doubtless the inner urge to render in English the rhythms, idiosyncracies, images, idioms and proverbs of the local speech. It is walking on a razor's edge for the Indo-Anglian writer, for it is easier to slip into the ludicrous than to achieve satisfying results of transplantation and triumphant verbal communication. Perhaps even the anaemic is to be preferred to the offensively novel! But at a deeper level, language transcends mere translation; the medium is the message, and the soul-charged piece of writing then acquires its own autonomy.

Let us, then, steer clear of the extremes of excessive gloom and mindless elation. It is gratifying that the 'Big Three' have lost none of their authenticity and appeal in the eighties, although their distinctive early work appeared in the thirties. There are also the new arrivals—Anita Desai, and Chaman Nahal, and Arun Joshi, and Salman Rushdie, for example—and of course the new poets, Kamala Das, A. K. Ramanujan, Gieve Patel, Jayanta Mahapatra; and the dramatists, led by Asif Currimbhoy, the most fecund and versatile of them all. Indeed, there is no need to be apologetic, or very apprehensive about the future.

II

POETRY I

First Poetry, for the 'poets' of Indo-Anglia today easily outnumber the novelists, dramatists and other practitioners of creative writing. The 'new poets' are a post-Independence phenomenon, no more than a distinctive trickle during the fifties in the pages of the *Illustrated Weekly*, then a stream during the sixties, and now almost a flood. In a recent interview, on being told that there are 300

poets in India writing in English, A.K. Ramanujan is reported to have said: "I say 'good luck' to them. Three hundred is not a large number for such a large country" (*Humanities Review*, Jan.-June 1981, p. 12). No doubt, by American standards (Ramanujan himself has lived in Chicago for 20 years), 300 is but a pitiful number. Five years ago, it was estimated by Kenneth Lamott that some 500,000 Americans wrote poetry. This may very well be true, for over 500 'poets' are represented in *New Voices in American Poetry—1980* (Vantage Press). In Britain, again, a thousand or more may be straining after poetic utterance. As for India, the checklists at the end of the 'WW' publications look more and more impressive as the years pass, and new poetry issues from other publishing houses like Prayer Books (Calcutta), Samkaleen Prakashan (New Delhi), World Poetry (Madras) and Clearing House (Bombay); and magazines too are generally hospitable enough to our poets and versifiers.

It is possible that this fecundity has been facilitated by the vogue for 'free verse' that is apt to be as free as free; perhaps, as A.K. Srivastava speculates: "the experimental bizarrerie of much English and American poetry written in recent years provokes in the Indian poet an irresponsible and reckless daring" (*Commonwealth Quarterly*, Sept. 1980, p. 115). In a perceptive and outspoken paper read at Hyderabad in January 1977, Nissim Ezekiel highlighted the very real dangers that beset Indian poets and critics when they blindly imitate their American contemporaries. One starts with a ready admiration for the exotic half-hysterical virtuosity and ventriloquism of the general run of American poets—"creatures of fantastic tensions beyond anything experienced by Indian poets"—and for the tireless industry and tortuous jargon of the American critics (who feel subjected to the same psychic pressures as the poets themselves), and one enthusiastically gives "all such verbal manifestation, poetic and critical, the benefit of the doubt". However, this is not all, for worse follows:

From that doubtful argument to the next step of imitation is soon taken in India, after a suitable time lag. No one knows how to cope with the imitation since no one knows what to make of the original (*Indian PEN*. Nov.-Dec, 1978, p. 9).

This fateful impulse to imitate the latest poetic fashion in USA

can infect even the more seasoned among 'Indian English' poets. Nissim Ezekiel refers in his paper to Jack Vernon's review of Jack Spicer's 'Collected Poems'. Spicer's speciality, we learn, is making chaos out of order, and he believes that "the explorative task of writing is one that should spread from poem to poem so that in a sense there is no such thing as an individual poem". This is matched by R. Parthasarathy's claim in the Preface to his *Rough Passage*:

This is a book where all the poems form part of a single poem, as it were . . . *Rough Passage* . . . should be considered and read as one poem.

In a sense . . . as it were! There is also the obsessive preoccupation with the language, as revealed in Meena Alexander's words quoted earlier, Kamala Das's "half English, half Indian, the language of the mind", and Parthasarathy's wail "My tongue in English chains . . ." Meenakshi Mukherjee thus makes the valid point that . . . these poems owe their origin to the poets' response to the "English language rather than to the urgent need to communicate a perception" (Paper read at the PEN Conference, Dec. 1972). Poetry may be written with words, but intrinsically it grows out of experience and is a recordation of fragments of experience.

With a few hundred 'poets'—some subscribing to the coterie culture of mutual adulation, some Bombay or Calcutta based, some perching on academic eminences, and many left out to shift for themselves somehow, somewhere—the enterprising anthologists come as a help to the bewildered 'common reader', and indeed there are more than a dozen anthologies to choose from. Lal's 600-page *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (1969) includes the work of 150, along with the 'credo' of each of these poets. Gokak's *Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1970) finds place for 108 poets, from Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Nissim Ezekiel and Ramanujan. Among other anthologists are Saleem Peeradina, R.P.N. Sinha, Pritish Nandy, Adil Jussawalla, Gauri Deshpande, O.P. Bhatnagar, Syed Ameeruddin, Subhas C. Saha, Pranab Bandyopadhyaya, Keki Daruwalla and R. Parthasarathy. Ever since Lal and Raghavendra Rao brought out their *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959) with their provocative Introduction, it has become customary for some of our anthologists to fall foul of Sri Aurobindo and the Romantics generally. For these our self-

righteous modernists, 'romantic' is a veritable red rag, or (as M.K. Naik puts it) "a double-dirty twice-four letter word"; and the 'mystical' can drive them to a cold fury beyond reckoning. Jussawalla, for instance, finds Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* "unwinding like an interminable sari . . . one vast onion of a poem" (*Readings in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. by William Walsh, 1973, p. 76). Parthasarathy declares that "*Savitri* fails as a poem because Ghose's talent and resourcefulness in the use of English was limited" (*Ten Twentieth Century Poets*, 1976, p. 2). And Keki Daruwalla is even more empathic. ". . . no other Indian poet was half as bad, none so nebulous or verbose, or who so thoroughly confused the inflated with the sublime" (*Two Decades of Indian Poetry*, 1981, p.xv). Is it of such perverse, purblind or puerile judicial pronouncements that the poet of *Savitri* wrote:

A bull-throat bellowed with its brazen tongue;
 Its hard and shameless clamour filling space
 And threatening all who dared to listen to truth
 Claimed the monopoly of the battered ear;
 A deafened acquiescence gave it vote,
 And braggart dogmas shouted in the night.
 (Book II, canto 7)

And there are dogmas enough, for example one by Parthasarathy:

Toru Dutt's poems mean little to us because our idea of poetry has changed since her day. This raises a crucial question: can we know outside or beyond our own era's ideas about language?

At this rate, all past poetry—Valmiki, Homer, Dante, Kalidasa, Kamban, Shakespeare, Goethe, Whitman, even T.S. Eliot—is irrelevant and unintelligible. We can therefore only play the perpetual Narcissus-role with a complacency that is oblivious of everything else. And here is another dogma (*Humanities Review*, July-Sept. 1979):

It (pre-1947) poetry has the vitality, or what was left of it, of an enslaved nation.

Is Parthasarathy insinuating that all pre-Independence poetry had the stigma of slavery, that it was flawed and emasculated for that reason, whereas poetry since the fifties is electrically free?

Subramania Bharati's poetry—to cite only a single example—had only a notional or residual vitality? Or perhaps the implied denigration applies to the Indo-Anglians alone? And as for the vaunted latter-day explosion of poetic freedom, M. K. Naik writes:

The King Log of Milton—Shelley—Tennyson has been superseded by the King Stork of Eliot—Yeats—Auden. The Ape has conquered again.

It is almost always a question of the Western voice finding its Indian echo with, of course, the “inevitable distortions”.

Their allergies, dogmas and constricted sensibilities notwithstanding, the anthologists have done well to highlight the work of a manageable number of present-day poets, and this helps the ‘common reader’ and even the academic in a hurry. Parthasarathy's anthology includes, besides himself, 9 others: Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar, Keki Daruwalla, Gieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar and Arvind K. Mehrotra. Besides most of these, Daruwalla includes Dilip Chitre, Gauri Deshpande, Eunice de Souza, Adil Jussawalla, Kersy Katrak, G. S. Sharat Chandra, Debi Patnaik and Saleem Peeradina. In his *Indian Poetry in English: 1947-1972*, Pritish Nandy accommodates, besides himself and several of those listed above, Dom Moraes, P. Lal, Keshav Malik, Anna Modayil, Rakshat Puri, Subhas Saha, Tilottama Rajan and a few others. The names that figure in all three anthologies are these lucky seven: Nissim, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Ramanujan, Gieve Patel, Keki Daruwalla and Arvind Mehrotra. This is not without significance, and all seven are among the eleven considered in detail in *Indian Poetry in English: A Critical Assessment*, edited by V.A. Shahane and M. Sivaramakrishna (1980).

Nissim Ezekiel is the seagreen incorruptible among the ‘new poets’, almost the equivalent of a poets’ poet for them. But since *The Exact Name* (1965), only one volume has appeared, *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). While the technical skill and virtuosity are undiminished, they are often pressed into the service of the trivial and the commonplace. “Ezekiel's delivery is mild and unemphatic,” says William Walsh, “a matter of cool diction, moderate metaphor, of syntax rather than music” (TLS, 3 Feb. 1978). There are derivative pieces like ‘The Truth about the Floods’, while the ‘Poster Poems’ are a cross between epigrammatic and experimental verse. ‘Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.’ and ‘The Railway Clerk’

are clever as well as cruel. Past middle age, the poet meets, within and without alike, a vacancy, a sterility, a darkness. 'The Egoist's Prayers' are striking enough, and although the ego declines to be diminished, there are also probing asseverations:

The price of wisdom
is too high,
but folly is expensive too.
Strike a bargain with me, Lord.
I'm not a man of ample means.

The 'Passion Poems' are drained of all passion and poetry alike, and it is strange that Ezekiel should discover in the Sanskrit poets only "breasts and buttocks". As for the 'Hymns in Darkness', they no doubt evoke darkness in some measure, but are they 'hymns'? This 16-piece sequence has a haunting waywardness of movement and taunting urgency of expression, but the dark is never light enough, and the dark is not darkness either—only the wizardry of words. But of course Ezekiel's is a major poetic talent, as may be inferred from the autobiographical 'Background, Casually' and the earlier poignantly evocative 'Night of the Scorpion' with its memorable close—

My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children.

Kamala Das won sudden recognition in 1965, and with her third volume, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), which included earlier work also, she has tried to stabilise her reputation as the *femme fatale* of Indo-Anglian poetry. Her 'confessional' poetry has been compared with that of Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Judith Wright. Her long 'Composition' is a sustained exercise in self-exposure, but such promiscuous self-exposure has only made a sensitive critic like Vimala Rao feel that "Kamala Das finally appears to be a poet of decadence. . . a victim of the inadequacies of her life, failing to gain control even over her art" (*Commonwealth Quarterly*, Dec. 1980, p. 19). Her autobiographical *My Story* and her experiments in prose fiction have further stimulated interest in the poet more than in the poetry. And now there is sleuthing after her Malabar antecedents, and M. Elias (JIWE, July

1978) concludes that, when Kamala Das speaks, it is "rather the Nair maiden unburdening her collective nightmare"; and so her sexual philosophy is to be traced back to "her own cultural heritage deriving from the South or Dravidian India". But it is more rewarding to read the poetry itself, and remember lines like—

I also know that by confessing
by peeling off my layers
I reach closer to the soul. . .
I shall some day see
my world de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded. . .

Here is something beyond the monotonous self-exhibitionism, and the deadening sex and sensuality.

Jayanta Mahapatra's *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* and *Relationship* (1980) reveal a first-rate poetic sensibility, and the last volume fittingly won the Sahitya Akademi award. Jayanta is a close observer of men and things, and he finds.

Every man, every beast
trapped, deaf in his own sleep . . .

The lyric notes are sharp, they sting—yet somehow satisfy. The cripples at Puri who are taken for granted, the white-clad widows: Truth seems twisted sometimes, yet pitiless. 'Hunger' is brutal in its precision of despair, neither pseudo-romanticism nor routine realism. In several of the 44 lyrics in *Waiting*, Jayanta seems half-unconsciously to recapitulate Vedic times and themes, for he too is Man watching Nature within and without. The ancient spiritual quest tugs at the physicist-poet's heart-strings. Why death? Why pain? Why this "wistful dreaming about the axis of the past"? *The False Start* is another vibrant string of lyrical poems, the running theme being the need to beyond defeat and attempt to reach after the seeming unattainable. *Relationship* is a sustained long poem, an expansion of the private lyric voice into a chain of meditations embracing a region, a tradition, a whole way of life. The theme and its half-hypnotic articulation alike compel respectful admiration. Jayanta enters into the spirit of the wonderful testaments in stone in Orissa's temples and exchanges heart-beats as it were with the forgotten artists and their unfolding works of sculpture and architecture. Distantly paralleled by Keats's 'Grecian Urn', Jayanta

too seems to be teased by the untameable phenomenon of men and gods, Time and Eternity. The long meandering lines send out creepers of longing and affliction and ecstasy, and the reader is slowly wafted toward the "dream the sun has kept awake through the years". Lyrical in intensity but epical in comprehension, *Relationship* is real achievement, for here there is neither 'waiting' nor 'false start', but triumphant arriving!

Ramanujan's *Selected Poems* (1976) hardly added anything to the stature he had attained with his earlier work. He is like one caught in the crossfire between the elemental pulls of his native culture and the aggressive compulsions of the Chicago milieu. On one side, the metaphor of the family with its ineluctable inner filiations, and on the other, the self-forged prison of linguistic sophistication. There is the Dravidian God, Murugan, whispering to the soul, and there are the distractions of everyday life. But these tensions, these challenges, these existential encounters, peter out in the end. There are only "sporadic skirmishes", says M.K. Naik, "minor engagements and hit and run tactics"; certainly not "a bold confrontation with experience" (HR, Jan.-June 1981, p. 18). We have in the result a small sackful of petty 'small scale' poetic merchandisc, no memorable poetry. Denied a shared childhood, marital life is a disharmony; and the remedy?

Probably

Only the Egyptians had it right:
Their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incests
of childhood into marriage.

And it was this same Ramanujan who rendered with power and grace the sparkling piece by a Sangam poet cited earlier (p. 671). It is rather sad that the spirit of consecration could by slow stages decline to almost cynical desecration in a foreign climate.

Gieve Patel is one of the 'Parsi Quartet', the other three being Keki Daruwalla, Adil Jussawalla and K.D. Katrak. A physician by profession, it is not surprising that he brings to his poetic art an uncanny sense of the anatomy of human experience and a flair for clinical precision, but backed by a basic dedication to health and wholesomeness. In the title poem in the volume *How Do You Withstand, Body* (1976), Gieve Patel's theme is the budget of hurts self-

inflicted thoughtlessly on his body by Man, and the body's powers of resistance as also of patient sufferance. As a physician, Gieve Patel may have seen numberless sick people (like the leper of 'Nargol'), many of them baring their self-wrought injuries, but Lord forgive them, they know not what they do! In poem after poem, Patel is the laureate of the Body, of its wounds, aches, pains, resiliences and recuperations. It needs a self-observant and self-critical eye to limn the physician's professional expertise:

How soon I've acquired it all! . . .
 My fingers deft to manoeuvre bodies,
 Pull down clothing, strip the soul.
 Give sorrow ear upto a point,
 Then snub it shut . . .

Keki Daruwalla has followed *Under Orion* (1970) and *Apparition in April* (1971) with *Crossing of Rivers* (1976). While his long Introduction to his anthology, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry*, betrays critical immaturity and irresponsibility, there is no doubt he is a genuine poet, especially of landscape. "For me", he writes, "poetry is first personal—exploratory, at times therapeutic and an aid in coming to terms with one's interior world". Of the 18 poems in his *Crossing of Rivers*, 14 are on the river Ganga, written out of a single day's varied experience of the river in Varanasi. Thus of a 'Boat-ride along the Ganga':

Dante would have been confused here.
 Where would he place this city
 In Paradise or Purgatory, or lower down
 Where fires smoulder beyond the reach of pity?

He is attracted, puzzled, repelled, and finally awed into acceptance of the River's incomprehensibility: "The river is a voice/in this desert of human lives".

Arvind K. Mehrotra is the youngest of the seven. His recent collections include *Three* (1973) and *Nine Enclosures* (1976), and he has been widely published in magazines. In his 'credo' contributed to Lal's anthology, he said with candour over a decade ago:

indians writing in english have made no mark when it came to poetry . . .
 nissim. you (lal). adil. people living in a dead, closed, soil-less world.

craving for attention in the far west. selling the little talent to see their name in print . . .

This self-denigration is as misleading as other poets' self-glorification. Mehrotra is probably influenced by surrealism, and he seems to have read and pondered contemporary poetry in UK and USA. Mehrotra too has written a series of 'Songs of the Ganga':

I am the plains
I am the foothills
I carry the wishes of my streams
To the sea

He can be acidly ironical and bitingly satirical as in 'The Sale', for example; in this Global Village ruled by commercial values, you can get anything for a price:

Yes, this is Europe,
that America. This scarecrow Asia,
that groin Africa and amputated
Australia . . .

And prices supersede values, and inventories drive verities out of circulation. Doubtless, Mehrotra's muse is in alliance with a 'high seriousness', but the articulation is often obscure.

III

POETRY II

Of the seven whose work has been very briefly reviewed in the previous section, only Jayanta seems to show clear signs of further growth (he started late too), and perhaps Mehrotra as well. Of the many other poets, only a few can be mentioned here. There are the poets-cum-anthologists: Lal, Pritish Nandy, Jussawalla, Krishna Srinivas, Peeradina, O.P. Bhatnagar, R. Parthasarathy; there are other 'arrived' poets like Shiv K. Kumar, Keshav Malik, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, K.D. Katrak; there are the women poets, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Gauri Pant, Laxmi Kannan, Anna Sujatha Modayil; and there are still others with their distinctive moods and unpredictable poetic moments, and new names

constantly join the ranks of the more familiar ones. It is difficult to keep track of them all.

First, then, P. Lal—a generalissimo if unacknowledged. While his monumental translation of the *Mahabharata* is making magisterial progress month after month, Lal has also published *The Man of Dharma and the Rasa of Silence* (1974) and *Calcutta: A Long Poem* (1978). Lal's is a tireless and restless talent, and what he writes usually carries the stamp of his commitment. *The Man of Dharma* is a poetic byproduct of the continuing tryst with the *Mahabharata*, at once a series of backward glances and an ascent, step by step, to the ineffable summits of Silence. Here is a scalding passage, about Karna and Kunti:

She was his mother.
What should he tell her who came as a beggar?
Where were you, mother, when I needed you most?
Five fingers of feeling. Five sons.
The sixth son, silent.

And the Homeric and Virgilian echoes touch the images with the tints of universality; and likewise, in 'The Fourth Finger', Kurukshetra overflows into Dachau, Hiroshima, Dresden, Biafra and My Lai, thereby transcending space and time. There are individual passages of beauty and brevity and bite, but the six limbs don't quite fuse into a unity in the poem. *Calcutta* is in 9 sections with a prose interlude. Admittedly "a long time cooking", the poem seems to have had a chequered history. Lal's is no doubt a great and compelling and impossible theme, and his problem is to evoke out of the bewildering variety an emerging unity. It is easy enough to evoke the stench, the squalor, the irrelevance, the callousness and the cumulative misery. The difficulty is to infer a meaning behind the chaos, a hope behind the despair, or at least to impose on the ingredients an enveloping form. The motley of characters (D'Mellow, Basu, Khosla, Sisir, Santipada, Rosario, Ahamad and Paramanada) is meant to suggest the staggering multiplicity, while Mother Teresa insinuates the residual saving grace of redemptive unity. It is an ambitious and somewhat ventriloquist effort, but the whole exercise remains a sort of tour-de-force, not a realised 'long poem'.

Pritish Nandy is something of a phenomenon, and it is difficult

to keep pace with his writing. *The Poetry of Pritish Nandy* (1973), a representative selection from his earlier verse, has been followed by *Riding the Midnight River*, *Lonesome Street* (1975), *The Nowhere Man* (1977) and *Pritish Nandy 30* (1978). Nandy's fecundity as a poet is obvious enough, but the reader is often put out. The typographical oddities seem frightening, the titles intriguing, the images disconcerting. Read without preconceptions, however, the apparently ill-assorted and chaotically permuted words convey the distinct nuances of meaning that we expect from a poet. There is much innovative audacity in the expression, and the staccato formations and pythonish twists and turns of phrase shock only to satisfy. Calcutta is Nandy's siren, and Durga, and Mohini, and death-wish, and chalice of resurrection:

Calcutta if you must exile me wound my lips before I go . . .
In summer Calcutta catches fire . . .
Near Deshpriya park they found him dead at last . . .

We are in the night still, and the dawn eludes us! *Lonesome Street* and *The Nowhere Man* attract by their content as well as their superb production. Love is the theme of *Lonesome Street*, and the rich photographic background heightens the impact of the poems. The pieces in the other two volumes are effusions, neither prose nor verse, but a not unacceptable mixture of the two. They are clearly inspired by the elemental forces of love and freedom, and both passion and violence as also loneliness and peace contribute to the texture of the poems. The talent is obvious, but the achievement is less than the promise or the possibility.

Adil Jussawalla has no use for the native Indian tradition which, in his opinion, is nothing but "a vagueness of thought, an absolute faith in the mystical, and a blind reliance on the heart". Oh for doses of clarity, rocky actuality and clinical intellectuality! Fourteen years after his *Land's End*, his second book *Missing Person* (1976) elicited from Homi Bhabha (the TLS reviewer) the epithet "the strongest among these poets". Many of "these poets" (Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Parthasarathy) have been 'exiles' (in UK, USA) for a longer or shorter period, and one can of course harbour the exile-feeling even when physically unexiled. As for Jussawalla:

uncertainties
 About the growth of 'parasites'
 (so a Hindu called us then) . . .
 I came to London—my scholarship a tail
 I'd learn to wag in public fairly soon

If Ezekiel speaks of the 'unfinished man' and Nandy of the 'no-where man', Jussawalla would sketch the 'Missing Person'. Jussawalla's poems of exile (written in UK) naturally lead to the 'home-coming and after' poems in *Missing Person*. Thus in 'Approaching Santa Cruz Airport':

I peer below. The poor, invisible
 Show me my place; that, in the air,
 With the scavenger birds, I ride.

Jussawalla is rather concerned about 'bourgeois' culture that is ready to grovel at the feet of the elect and equally ready to exploit the proletariat. The brown sahib is the old colonial in a native guise, incarcerated in his own contradictions. *He* is the 'missing person'; he must find himself first, before others can recognise and respect him.

Krishna Srinivas has been editing the international monthly, *Poet*, for over two decades, and has sponsored several anthologies. His own recent work is a series of 'cosmic' poems, *River*, *Wind*, *Ageless Fires*, *Earth* and *Void*. They have come out now in an abridged form, *Five Elements* (1981). The abridgement has the merit of compactness but lacks the amplitude of the originals. Each of the five elements defies understanding except in primordial terms, and thus what is attempted is strictly beyond attainment. Nevertheless Krishna tries to weave webs of relationships between the cosmic, the historical, the scriptural, the mythical and the personal, and the reader is alternately thrilled and baffled, edified and exasperated. Moses and Buddha, Valmiki and Neruda, the waste land and the solitary reaper, Zen and *dhyān* . . . all tumble together, and one feels exposed to a variety of intimations from the poets, prophets and philosophers of all time. From the Transcendent emerged these 'five elements', and they must ultimately roll back also to the Illimitable Permanent. It is a mystic theme of vast potentialities, and notwithstanding the thematic gyrations and the spurts of extravagant or explosive phrasing, the total articula-

tion must attract attention.

Saleem Peeradina edited an anthology of *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* in 1972, but his own poems, *First Offence*, appeared only in 1980. "My stance has been", says Peeradina, "that of an observer. I am a student of detail, of close scrutiny". He is a miniaturist, and his stance swings uncertainly between the satiric and the ironic. In 'To a wife not my own', the poet regrets a lost opportunity:

Did you never notice the way my gaze failed
to make your brief rite perpetual?

His camera eye is uncanny as in 'Bandra' or the shorter 'Devotional', but he can also be merely cheap and nasty:

The alarm's ringing peters out
like a boy's arc of piss . . .

Another academic, O.P. Bhatnagar, has made an anthology of Indo-English Poetry for *Commonwealth Quarterly*, and his own work is collected in *Poems, Angles of Retreat* and *Oneiric Visions* (1980). He says candidly:

My visions are oneiric,
visual, immediate and self-owned
offering no mysticism
mixed with farce
like bird songs
in cage enclosed . . .

A poem is a smile: a framed sand-dune: a dream recaptured. When we try to imprison its essence, it eludes us—or the capsule bursts. The reading of some of these poems—'Like Phoenix risen from the Ashes', for example—can become a dream-experience too.

Anthologist, critic, publisher's editor, R. Parthasarathy's *Rough Passage* (1977), a sequence of 37 pieces, is the consummation, through repeated revision and elimination, of 20 years' poetic activity. Again, as in Jussawalla, the 'Exile-Trial-Homecoming' syndrome, but here longer pondered, better structured and chiselled, and more memorably articulate. Having experimented with various verse forms, Parthasarathy has settled at last for the loose 3-line verse unit, as if echoing or atomising the trinitarian frame of

reference. It is as though Parthasarathy is enacting a dialogue within, like Eliot's *Prufrock*. Comparing some of the present versions with those published earlier, one marks a tightening up, a tautness, a sureness, but also a comparative drying up of the creative clan. Parthasarathy's ideal seems to be that poetry should try "to arrest the flow of language, to anaesthetise it, to petrify it, to fossilise it". This anti-romantic dogma, if blindly followed, can reduce poetry to settled sediment, hardened mud, a mere fossil on exhibition. Actually, the poet is more conventional than the theorist. Having learnt in exile that "roots are deep", he returns home, and although he venerates his Dravidic heritage, he finds present-day Tamil "an recognisable carcass/quick with the fleas of Kodambakkam"! The memory of love's incandescence is something, but the prose of everyday life invades again, and there are lacerations or resigned acceptances. The sequence concludes:

Hereafter, I should be content,
I think, to go through life
with the small change of uncertainties.

Shiv K. Kumar was already a professor and critic of standing when he suddenly turned to poetry; "a late bloomer", he calls himself, and his four volumes (*Articulate Silences*, 1970; *Cobwebs in the Sun*, 1974; *Subterfuges*, 1976; *Woodpeckers*, 1979) reveal at once his sense of form and feeling for precise evocative language, as also his restless cerebration and his edged sensibility. His imagistic poems often stand and stare, and sometimes scream and spit. Poems like 'My Co-respondent' are sharply pointed and envenomed as well. His 'Border Guards' with its humanistic undertones has deservedly found a place in school anthologies. He can be mercilessly truthful, as in 'At the Ghats of Banaras', although perhaps missing the deeper reality. Here is his 'word-picture of 'Indian Women':

Patiently they sit
like empty pitchers
on the mouth of the village well
pleating hope in each braid
of their Mississippi-long hair . . .

Why this morganatic marriage of Indian theme and American

imagery? Or is that the whole point of the poem? Sex is the drugged diet of quite a few of the poems, and it stales after a time. Altogether a poet apart, and still groping in the tunnel for the light beyond.

Bilingual poets both, Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar write in Marathi and English. Dilip Chitre's *Travelling in a Cage* (1980) is a long poem in 17 Sections that took shape when he felt self-exiled in USA. The exile's sense of isolation (alas! he had come as a poet, not as a Guru or gigolo) and frantic search for moorings fill the spaces of the poem:

Where can I hide now in this
Stark nakedness lit by a bare bulb . . .
What doors can I open in this fear
What windows look out
And will I ever find my own face out there . . .

Of course, this swinging between here and there, the past and the present, the present and the future, facilitates a measure of self-discovery and even self-assurance. Of Chitre's other poems, 'Ode to Bombay' is almost elegiac, and 'The Felling of the Banyan Tree' is very moving:

Insects and birds begin to leave the tree
And then they came to its massive trunk
Fifty men with axes chopped and chopped
The great tree revealed its rings of two hundred years
We watched in terror and fascination this slaughter
As a raw mythology revealed to us its age . . .

Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* (1976) is a poetic sequence. Jejuri is a pilgrim centre to the south-east of Poona, and Khandoba is the deity worshipped; Chaitanya visited this place in early 16th century. Kolatkar describes a visit to Jejuri, reaching it by bus and returning by train. During the interval, the poet goes round, sees gods, priests, men, animals and rodents, and *Jejuri* is the record of his impressions. There are 38 lyrics, but the poet's is an uneasy, neutral, wry stance, "and every other stone is god or his cousin". The temples are in ruins, and ill-lighted; the water-supply is defective; there are beggars, and the hill-ranges dominate the prospect. There is much stirring of the peevish gutter of the just-below-

the-surface consciousness, and one receives no light, no exhilarating surprise or surmise. It is all secular and pseudo-clinical, and the sequence is not so much a paean of discovery as the proverbial drain-inspector's poetic reportage. And yet Kolatkar has a real mastery of the language, and there is the stir of uneasy life in many of the pieces. As an exercise in cold-blooded realism and the debunking of a place of pilgrimage, the sequence has perhaps a price-tag of its own.

Kersy D. Katrak (the 4th of the Parsi quartet) published *Diversions by the Wayside* in 1969; and his recent *Underworld* (1979) has 5 sections—on undergraduates, underdogs, undertakers, undercurrents and understandings, respectively. This fondness for word-balancings must involve rifling a dictionary for verbal effects, which is but a barren exercise. Kirpal Singh's *Twenty Poems* (1978) has received some attention, and a single poem—

you smoke/i don't
 you smoke/i don't
 you smoke/i don't
 between us/only/smoke and ashes—

has been interpreted variously by different readers of *JIWE*, and the ultimate moral drawn is that repeated misunderstandings can explode only in smoke and ashes!

Keshav Malik's is a tested and seasoned muse, maturer than Katrak's or Kirpal Singh's; and his recent volumes (*Poems*, 1971; *Storm Warning*, 1979; *26 Poems*, 1982) help to consolidate his standing as a poet. "Publishing poetry in India", says Malik, "has Kafkaesque overtones; one never knows where he or she stands". There is no doubt where Keshav Malik stands—it is among the authentic poets on the doorsteps of achievement. In the latest volume itself, he distils the tragic *rasa* with uncanny sureness in poems like 'End of an Aristocrat'. One doesn't miss poems with brighter tints either, for indeed here dazzles us "a plurality of colours".

Subhas Chandra Saha, publisher of poetry and anthologist of Indo-Anglian love poetry, has published nearly 200 pieces collected in *The Unseen Bird* (1971), *The Ruins of the Morning* (1975), *After Midnight* (1981) and other volumes. Saha is not afraid to own an admiration for Shelley; and he claims: "My poetry is

rooted in the Indian situation which I share in common with my readers everywhere in India". In 'The Poet', Saha disarms his readers with the lines:

We are postmen carrying images
with a signature.

The poet cannot help himself, in fact, anymore than the postman can avoid delivering the letters committed to his charge. Living in a city—and Calcutta too—is a provocation, yet inhibits lyric articulation. "A dry city with fluorescent bulbs"! "The city furrowed with bricks"! The 'Jhalda' poems, however, counterpoint with the Calcutta reactions, for "Jhalda has a soul". Like places, Nature also affects the poet, and the Moon is an obvious favourite. And of course 'love': "and let us love, and love, and do nothing else"!

There are others, and others, who essay poetry in English distinctive enough for one or another reason, but the limitations on space overrule any detailed discussion. A senior teacher, scholar and critic, D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu's poems (*The Song of the Red Rose, and Other poems*, 1982), are marked by their authenticity, individuality and the play of variety in theme and utterance. There is the fusion of the experiential and meditative modes, and the phrasing is crisp and suggestive, the rhythms are organic and insinuating, and the mythical poems bridge the past and the present with a bold imaginative grasp of the infinitudes. 'The Readiness in All' is fairly typical of DVK's integrity, sensibility and power of evocation:

Today
After the great stupor,
Life is ready once again
To limn a poem on light.

A younger academic, K. Srinivasa Sastry's *An Aria of Ecstasy* (1978) and *Across the Ocean* (1980) are steeped in the wisdom of India as well as the knowledge of the West. *Aria* was born and nurtured and shaped in deep anguish, and a high elegiac tone pervades the poem. *Across the Ocean*, however, is about people and places in India seen through the eyes of one who has been for some years in the West. Moments are caught as it were in amber,

and we see a variety of moods and stances, ranging from the farcical to the near-sublime. There are dream-sequences too, and poems with a metaphysical cast as well.

In Chotte Bharaney's superbly produced *Dilemma* (1981), while the poems augment the illustrations with electric currents of meaning, the illustrations too invade the poems with vibrations of their own. Here is a voice that adroitly fuses the dialectic of doubt with the passion for Truth. The dilemmatic cast, whether it means seizing the bull by its horns or merely escaping between them, gives a piquancy to many a piece. Bharaney is a master of the grammar of paradox, and he penetrates through the paradoxes to reach at the inclusive Truth. Behind and beyond them, there is Truth abiding, Love abiding, Goodness abiding, if only we can see and feel and think straight, and be just ourselves. The lyrical, narrative and dramatic modes meet and merge to make *Dilemma* an honest, courageous and wholesome testament.

Prem Kirpal's 'song of the seventies' of his life, *The Cosmic Sea* (1979), is an unusual performance. At a time when a few pages of sparse print and opaque wordage pass for the newer and higher poetry, Kirpal's volume may seem to condemn itself by its bulk, audacious range and above all its immediate intelligibility. The title-piece with its wayward ruminations seems disjointed, but the connecting thread is the poet's sensibility. In the other pieces, various emotions (including love and the thrill of places) are recollected in tranquillity. Having been too long in the West, Kirpal is now back in India with "a bit of my heart" left afar. But the heart is by no means "fracted and corroborate", and the impression left by the 86 poems is one of robustness and acceptance. There are insightful reveries transcribed with metrical ease and stylistic competence, and the reader can relax as well as find food for reflection.

Kota S. R. Sarma's *The Return of the Rambler* (1981), described as a poetico-philosophic dramatic poem of Human Life, is in 10 sections and is written in a miscellany of moods, verse forms and styles, often using words from other languages for Procrustean metrical reasons. The poem also carries its own sumptuous load of annotation, appended to the respective sections. Cast in the form of an inner odyssey, there is first a false identification of the shadow with the Real, followed in course of time by the experience of Love, the vicissitudes of everyday actuality, the communion with

Nature, the influence of the wise, and the final withdrawal of the soul from the body:

Piercing eons in timeless Time,
Returning the Bow, the Arrow flies!

Sarma's is an ambitious effort at blending Eastern and Western thought, and although the effects are sometimes bizarre, the total articulation has a pronounced individuality.

Like Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar, Jayasudharshana is bilingual too, and he writes in both Kannada and English. Several of the pieces included in his *Of Roots and Flights* (1980) are temperamental effusions imprisoning particular moments, and while Jayasudharshana is conscious of the world of modern science and is not unwilling to take off adventurously, he retains his links with the roots, and this is no small merit. His 'Prayer to the Lord Unsung' is on an unusual theme, and 'Chaos as a form of Expression' has its own insights and urgency.

The elegiac is a difficult *rasa* to bring out in its pure and universal poignancy, but K. T. Narasimhachar's *Agony* (1980) is a moving sonnet-sequence wrung out of deep distress caused by the death of his wife, and every piece vividly recaptures moments from the past now lost for ever. Actually, holy wedded love is too sacred, too sublime, for even poetic recordation. The wounds of bereavement pain all the more under exposure to the public. When the fateful moment occurs and passes, the sensibility is crushed for a while; then a day, a week, a month, and presently years, and sorrow's journeying has its own rhythm and its own music, and there is catharsis in this final resignation and acceptance.

Of other poets, no more than a few can be listed here: Dilip Hero (*Interior, Exchange, Exterior*, 1980); Somesh Dasgupta, (*Tactile Moments*, 1977); R. Bangaruswami (*Ventures in Verse*, 1981); Syed Ameeruddin (*A Lover and a Wanderer*, 1980); Rabindranath Menon (*Grass in the Garden*, 1978, *Pebbles on the Shore*, 1981); K.V.S. Murti (*The Allegory of Eternity*, 1975; *Symphony of Discords*, 1977); Som P. Ranchan (*Christ and I: A Dialogue*, 1980); I. K. Sharma (*The Shifting Sand-dunes*, 1976); Vijay Raghava Rao (*Nirvana and other Poems*, 1977); G.L. Mathur's satirical *Is this Free India* (1981), and Amal Ghose's *Flames of Agonies* (1973).

The Women Poets: they are poets first, and only generically—and some, perhaps, defiantly—women. They are not all of a piece, anymore than the males of the species are. Next to Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza is the most convincingly combative of the women poets. If Kamala Das has her Kerala-Nair antecedents, Eunice's are Goan-Catholic. Eunice has had a cosmopolitan education, and pursues with some doggedness the twin professions of teaching and journalism. Although her poems have been appearing for a decade past in journals, her first collection, *Fix*, came out only in 1980. Critics have predictably linked Eunice with Sylvia Plath and the other 'confessional' women poets. In her fiercely honest search for identity as a unique autonomous Person—not simply Goan, Catholic, or even Woman—Eunice has had to break the fetters of convention, tradition and propriety itself. "Forgive me, mother", she says; "In dreams/I hack you"! The reader is chastely shocked: what a thing to say! Oh the fatality of being born a woman:

I have heard it said
my parents wanted a boy.
I've done my best to qualify.
I hid the bloodstains
of my clothes
and let my breasts sag . . .

And thus about the pharisaical hypocrisy of rationed charity:

Bring your plates. Don't move.
Don't try turning up for more
. . . Say thank you
and a rosary for us every evening . . .

Has she dipped her pen in acid? Is Eunice amusing herself throwing spoonfuls of boiling oil on fellow Goans, fellow Catholics, fellow humans (men *and* women)? This from 'Autobiographical':

I thought the whole world
was trying to rip me up
cut me down go through me
with a razor blade
then I discovered
a cliché: that's what I wanted
to do to the world.

The engines of her rage are fuelled by a language that is as it were fissioned for destructive effect. And yet woman cannot stay alone, and man cannot either; beyond this war of attrition, this screech and fury and expense of spirit, there is—there must be—a new adult understanding and harmony. In the meantime, is Eunice's the poetry of ruthless honesty, or but the scream of desecration? I will give the benefit of the doubt, and call it the former.

Of other women poets but briefly here. Lakshmi Kannan (*Impressions*, 1974; *The Glow and the Grey*, 1976) has been clearly influenced by Kamala Das, as in these lines:

no, no, don't run.
 don't take long strides,
 don't raise your voice,
 be a woman, be moderate in everything
 be a model of mediocrity . . .

She feels that poetry in English by Indian women oscillates between writing as a social manifestation or assertiveness and the desire to accomplish a literary competence (*Commonwealth Quarterly*, Sept., 1979, p. 50). Mamta Kalia (*Tribute to Papa*, 1974; *Poems '78*, 1979) can write with her tongue in her cheek:

I'm working for a Ph.D. these days.
 Even if I know
 I'll never complete the thesis,
 never mind,
 that I'm registered is enough.
 I'll talk my lungs out about it.
 It's all to wangle a Readership you see.
 The university needs me.

A few more names and titles: Anna Sujatha Modayil (*Crucifixions*, 1970; *We the Unreconciled*, 1972); Sunita Jain (*Man of My Desires*, 1978; *Between You and God*, 1979); Rina Sodhi (*Selected Poems*, 1981); Gauri Pant (*Weeping Season*, 1971; *Voodoo*, 1972; *Staircase 17*, 1973); Meena Alexander (*The Bird's Bright Ring*, 1976; *Without Place*, 1978); Lalitha Venkateswaran (*Rocking Horse*, 1973; *Tree-Bird*, 1975); Christine Krishnaswami (*Iris in Dark Water*, 1981); Suniti Namjoshi (*Cyclone in Pakistan*, 1972; *The Jackass and the Lady*, 1980); Asha Sheth (*Image, Poems*, 1974); Sivakami Velliangiri

(*Ten Poems*, 1980). There is also the anthology, *Hers: Verse by Indian Women*, edited by Mary Ann Dasgupta, herself a poet (*The Circus of Love*, 1975). The collection includes work by Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Lakshmi Kannan, A.S. Modayil, and others. We have reached the stage where more women than men are essaying verse, and packing the universe into pellets of poetry. This cabaret room where the elite woman sits sipping her coke (and maybe smoking too) and commenting on life around in elegant English: "I cook, I wash/I bear, I rear/ I nag, I wag/I sulk, I sag" is an interesting symptom of contemporary life. The women are 'splendid'; they are clever; they are touchy; they are ductile in their own ego. Some are so much engrossed in their own petty sex-sparring with males that they are almost blind to the immense luring beauty—the terribilita—of the Indian landscape where toils the Indian Woman of Sorrows. Certainly, the women poets of today have dared all that men had dared, and they have few inhibitions. Freedom and energy often team together, but there is need also to go beyond the recurrent sense of hurt and appetite for strife, and reach at the beauty, harmony, peace, fulfilment. And this is on the women poets' agenda too.

As for the future—be it men's poetry or women's poetry—it needn't be too readily taken for granted that poets will for all time to come settle for the 'small scale', the satiric, the ironic, the trivial, the anti-romantic, the anti-spiritual, or opt for the Freudian fascination for the libidos, the diseased preoccupation with the putrid gutter of the dark unconscious, the fatefully irresistible impulse to foul one's nest (be it one's country, one's culture, one's village with its temples, tanks and river, or one's home and family and household gods), or the irrational urge to tarnish, diminish, destroy rather than to heighten, greaten and create. There are no doubt the problems of language, identity and audience, the need for roots, the need for a faith in poetry, the need for a hope for the future, but nothing is gained by making a mystique of our current irritations, fads and fanaticisms, mystifying others and mystifying ourselves.

Will the future Indian poetry, then, perpetuate the current self-tortured poignancy and vagabond eccentricity in theme, stance and expression, or (as Sri Aurobindo prophesied) achieve a breakthrough in consciousness and attain a clairvoyant power of utterance

approximating to the 'mantra'? It is our ardent hope and faith that the future Indian poetry—and with it, Indian poetry in English—will strive towards a symphony of many notes, discarding no part of the human experience, rejecting no segment of our national poetic heritage since the time of the Vedic singers and the Tamil 'Sangam' poets, but insinuating the interpenetrating 'bootstrap' unity of the local and the universal, the personal and the transcendental, as also of *vak* and *artha*, matter and spirit, outer and inner life, the dynamics of becoming and the poise of Being. It is with this hope and faith that we would venture to recall these prophetic lines from *Savitri*:

Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life. . .
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy. . .
 Highpriests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
 Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
 And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods
 And dancers within rapture's golden doors.
 Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
 And justify the light on Nature's face.

(Book III, canto 4)

IV

DRAMA

'Indo-Anglian Drama': isn't it like talking about 'snakes in Iceland'? Not quite,—but the problem is there, for while poetry, novels and non-fiction prose can be read in the silence of one's study, Drama can come to life only in the theatre. Lately, however, a change in the climate is perceptible. The Theatre Group in Bombay, and similar agencies elsewhere, have successfully produced plays in English by Indians: for example, Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness*, Asif Currimbhoy's *The Doldrummers*, Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib*, Gieve Patel's *Princes* and Shiv K. Kumar's *The Last Wedding Anniversary*. Gurcharan Das told R. Parthasarathy some years ago in the course of an interview: "English theatre in India will have to project the kind of hybrid English we

speak, interspersed with Indian expressions". This may mean local verisimilitude, but only at the expense of national intelligibility. Or the characters and situations will have to be confined to the top English-educated English-speaking denationalised elitocracy (or sophistocracy). Either way, the playwright's task is not easy. Or, perhaps, he can skip the contemporary scene, and opt for the classical, mythological or historical themes.

Better known as a poet, Nissim Ezekiel has a volume of plays as well: *Three Plays* (1969). Of the three, *Nalini: A Comedy* is about the painter, Nalini, and the two advertising executives, Raj and Bharat, both with ulterior motives for interesting themselves in an exhibition of her paintings. Bharat tells the more naive Raj:

"I'm perfectly capable of acting without thinking, like you, like all my friends . . . we are all in good jobs . . . we read good books—foreign books, of course . . . we are modern only as it suits us".

Nalini herself has the double-personality of the artist, half-woman half-omniscient with the eyes of God, and thus isolated from humanity. For a play of 3 Acts, *Nalini* hasn't sap enough, and it ends, not with a bang but a whimper—and the whimper is intentional. *Marriage Poem: A Tragi-Comedy* concerns Naresh, whose possessive wife, Mala, constantly calls the tune at home and leads the dance, though this doesn't prevent his liaison with Leela. In short he has the best (or the worst) of both worlds. For advice, Mala turns to the middle-aged Mrs. Lall who exhorts the injured wife to make a terrible fuss and raise hell and "complain to the Home Minister". Not that Mala needs these tips, for on her own she is quite equal to any situation. The third play, *The Sleepwalkers*, is an one-act farce built on the theme "Give us this day our daily American!" A party to a visiting American couple: and the invitees are a cross-section of the pseudo-elitocracy. The Indian guests are in masks, and even these "cannot be seen in the darkness". But the hollow vessels make loud enough sounds, and you cannot mistake the satire.

Asif Currimbhoy¹ has been writing plays for over 20 years at the rate of two per year, and this fecundity in alliance with his feeling

¹For a detailed critique, see 'The Dramatic Art of Asif Currimbhoy' by K.R.S. in *Indo-English Literature*, ed. by K.K. Sharma (Vimal Prakashan, 1977).

for variety and talent for versatility makes him the most prolific and the most successful of our dramatists. Farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy, history, fantasy: Currimbhoy handles them all with commendable ease. He is often topical too: the 8-act play, *Inquilab* (1970) was on the Bengal naxalite movement, *The Refugee* (1971) on the influx of Bangla refugees into India during the year, and the 4-act *Sonar Bangla* (1972) on the travails preceding the emergence of independent Bangla Desh. *Om Mane Padme Hum* (1972) was on the Chinese invasion of Tibet and *Angkor* (1973) on the beauty and fatality of Indo-China. *The Miracle Seed* (1973) was on the famine in Maharashtra, and *The Dissident MLA* (1974) on the revolt of the students in Gujarat. In one of the longer earlier plays, *Monsoon, or a Noah' Ark* (1965), which was produced at Dallas Theatre Centre, Texas, the action unfolds in one of the tropical islands in the Malaysian archipelago. The British as a political force have withdrawn from the island, but there are survivals like the educationist, Andrew. Don Juan is the anglicised native who has returned from UK with his medical degree. 'Monsoon' is both the season of rains and the name of the heroine. As with some of his other plays, the technical expertise here is praiseworthy, and all is polarised between the open sea-front with Ling's restaurant on one side, and Andrew's house on stilts on the other. With Andrew, isolation is even worse than alienation, breeds the wildest fantasies, and in the end he strangles Monsoon and himself becomes insane. In the more recent play, *This Alien . . . Native Land* (1975), the theme is the isolation and alienation experienced by a Jewish family in Bombay. 'Israel' and 'India': one is their native land and the other is their adopted land—but exactly which is which? The country 'India' where the family has lived for two thousand years,—is 'India' an 'alien' land? The characters are six: father, mother, elder son, younger son, sister, elder son's wife (who is the Indian girl, Tara). India's independence and Israel's emergence are the two poles between which the family's affiliations revolve, and there is no easy way out of their perplexities. As in O'Neill's *The Long Day's Journey into Night*, there are excruciating meanderings in the hinterland of the unconscious—sharp revelations alternate with agonising insights and startling lightning-flashes. The father dies, the daughter Sarah escapes to Israel, the elder son marries Tara, and mother and

younger son, David, try to establish a desperate relationship that is an isolation worse than the isolation they dread. It is both a painful and a powerful play, with intimations of disturbing universality. Like the waterfront in *Monsoon*, the High Rise apartments and the sea beyond form a fitting background to this play so full of longings and lacerations. The near-disintegration that overtakes the Jewish family is rather prototypical of what happens—or could happen—to small communities or minorities that have somehow precariously established themselves far from their native habitats. Like an Indian family in remote Canada or Australia, Kenya or Uganda. But *Monsoon* and *This Alien . . . Native Land* need the resources of an experimental theatre and the direction of an imaginative producer: then will these plays galvanise into life on the stage.

Can Poetic Drama be revived in our time? Eliot, Charles Williams and Christopher Fry (these among others) have tried to give this difficult genre a new lease of life. Kailasam tried too, in *Karna—the Brahmin's Curse*. A more recent exercise is S. Raman's *Karna* (1979). What makes Raman's play different from Kailasam's is the thematic transformation. In Kailasam (see Ch. XII earlier, pp. 227ff.), we have spitfires of questionings and volcanoes of emotional outbursts. In Raman, we have only a "calm of mind, all passion spent". Raman seems to have been influenced by the Tamil poet Villiputturar, and by T.S. Eliot and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Fate being inscrutable, why scream against it? What is fate, after all? Is it an eruption of evil, or merely the will of God? Raman's Preface quotes Dante: "In His will is our peace". This serene acceptance lies on the 5-act drama as a gauze of pearly light. Raman's play concentrates on the last day in Karna's life. Surya, Indra, Kunti, Krishna—one after another they take away Karna's defences, but also prepare him for his great rehabilitation. He is first flooded by a nameless irresistible love for Arjuna, and he knows the truth when Kunti tells him that they are brothers. No hesitations or misgivings for him now, and he feels fulfilled when he is vouchsafed Krishna's *Visvarupa*. In Karna's character, Raman has properly correlated the human and the Divine, and integrated in the epic story the *Brihadaranyaka* idea of the warp and woof of Space and Time.

Lakhan Deb's *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1974) echoes the title of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Becket of Canterbury and

Mahatma Gandhi are martyrs both, and there are other filiations too between the two plays. Deb describes his effort as "a forum where ideas, viewpoints and even opinions argue themselves out in the presence of the ideal". Thus, there is the first visitor, the Liberal of the Gokhale School; then other visitors, representing various political colours, including the Communist. The Chorus comprises a group of women from the Punjab.

Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1970), a play in 3 acts, is based on certain events in the Punjab 150 years ago. After the death of Ranjit Singh (the Lion of the Punjab), Henry Lawrence is appointed the East India Company's Resident in the Court of Ranjit Singh's 12-year old son, Dalip Singh. Lawrence is chosen by the Governor-General Lord Hardinge, because "he's a regular sort... civil servant, Haileybury, efficient, proven record, very Christian, proper, doesn't mix with the natives... the reputation of the man is phenomenal... *The Lawrence!*" At first, *Larins Sahib* wants only to be a just and efficient administrator, but the atmosphere of intrigue and the charisma of the Rani make him harbour megalomaniac ambitions. He would like to be Angrez Badshah, and he feels drawn to the Rani. His altered behaviour and unpredictable actions alienate his own friends and swell the ranks of his enemies. The Koh-i-noor diamond that he receives from the Rani as "a symbol of our friendship" proves dead sea-fruit to him. There is the inevitable nemesis, and his dreams of glory crash about him with his sudden withdrawal from the Punjab. Gurcharan Das's *Mira* (1971) is an attempt to present the theme of Mira's immaculate God-love with all the sophistication of the contemporary theatre. *Mira* seems to have been successfully produced as a ballet in New York, and as a play in Bombay. The assumption behind Das's play is that sexual frustration in her life with her princely husband drove Mira to divine-love. This is a naive view, and the splendid decisive spiritual turn in Mira's life is not shown as happening inevitably, given the nexus of character and circumstances. Das's third play, *Jakhoo Villa*, is set in our time, and the theme is the decadence that has overtaken a Hindu family in Simla.

Gieve Patel's *Princes* (1970) describes the state of war between two Parsi families of South Gujarat for the exclusive possession of a male child whose dead mother belongs to one family and living father to another, and the boy is the only 'male' hope of both

families. This sort of meaningless mini-Panipat is acted not unoften in India, and this invests the play with the tremors of universality. The ultimate casualty in the attritional cross-fire between the families is the boy himself, who is already frail, and cannot stand the emotional storms raging about him with increasing ferocity. In his more recent play, *Savaksa* (extracts from which were reproduced in the *Indian Express*, 28 Feb. 1982), the 60-year old Savaksa wants to marry the 20-year old Perin, but her elder sister, Hutoxi, intervenes to prevent if possible the monstrous alliance. Once again, it is about a Parsi family, and the spoken English has a nervous power, and the theme transcends the Gujarati or Parsi milieu.

Girish Karnad, author of the Kannada plays, *Tughlaq* and *Yayati*, has now translated into English his own *Hayavadana* (1975). It is based on the *Katha-sarit-sagara* tale that Thomas Mann used for his short novel, *The Transposed Heads*. In all his three plays—be the theme historical, mythical or legendary—Karnad's approach is 'modern', and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intensities, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements. Devadatta and Kapila are close friends, one the intellectual and the other the sensual type. Devadatta is already married to Padmini when Kapila falls in love with her. The friends, as a way out, kill themselves. In rejoining the severed limbs, Padmini transposes the heads, and the resulting confusion of identities and the complications arising from it drive them to fight a duel, and they kill themselves again. Now Padmini ascends their funeral pyre and performs 'sati'. Even without the psychological dimension, it is a tantalising story, and Karnad makes the most of it.

Although "provincial little Herods" may scream: "Butcher (the Indo-Anglian playwrights), castrate them, and force them to write in their native (Indian language)"¹, these are but wild and whirling words, and are unlikely to deter sundry Indians from writing plays (or poetry or fiction) in English. There is K. Nagarajan, whose *Chidambaram* (1955) is a flashback chronicle play in 14 episodes involving characters like Vyagrapada and Patanjali, Arjuna and Shiva, Madhavi and Kannagi, Sekkizhar and Umapati Shivacharya

¹*Perspectives on Indian Drama in English*. ed. by M.K. Naik and Mokashi-Punekar, (1977, quoted on p. 192).

... and even the birth of the Annamalai University! There is, at the other end, Shiv K. Kumar's *The Last Wedding Anniversary* (1975), which has something of the painful, probing and merciless intensity of *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? The wedding anniversary turns out to be the wedding valedictory and break-up of the married life of Rupa and Lalit Khanna.

Another playwright, M.V. Rama Sarma, noted Milton scholar and critic, has in his *Collected Plays* (1982) brought together 11 of his plays written over a period of 40 years. The early playlets ('Youth and Crabbed Age', 'Like to Like', 'This busy World') were written under the influence of Shaw. *Shakuntala* is a 3-act play, the three stages of development being 'The Maiden', 'The Castaway' and 'The Woman' now "perfect and dignified, chastened and sublimated through patient suffering". In 'Marpessa', the human heroine prefers the human lover to the divine Apollo. *Urvashi*, too, affirms the superiority of the dynamic human to the static divine condition. Of the remaining plays, *Towards Marriage* and *The Carnival* are realistic or satirical, while *The Mahatma* (1979) is an attempt to highlight Gandhiji's martyrdom concentrating on the events of 20th and 30th January 1948.

Plays long and short continue to be written, published and occasionally even produced. To cite a few more: Manohar Malgonkar's *Line of Mars* (1971), about Lord Dalhousie's regime of expansion culminating in 1857; Ahmed Akhtar's *Anarkali* (1978), a historical play; Dina Mehta's *The Myth-Makers* (1969); Arati Nagarwalla's *The Bait* (1969), about a bereaved husband who makes his son a 'bait' to lure and kill the tiger that had killed the wife; Murlidas Melwani's *Deep Roots* (1970), a study of upper middle-class alienation and hypocrisy; Lawrence Bantleman's *The Award* (1973); K.S. Duggal's *To Each a Window: Six Radio Plays* (1981); Louella Lobo Prabhu's *Broken Melody* (1981) and other plays. And I may conclude with Masti Venkatesa Iyengar's *Kalidasa* (1980); a rasika's attempt to reconstruct the probable life-history of the Prince of Poets, weaving a web of relationships between the man and his work, or Life and Letters. In the light of what has been detailed above, it may not be wide of the mark to say that Indian drama in English will have but a limited vogue, a minority appeal, and yet on that score it is not to be written off as being of no consequence whatsoever.

V

FICTION I

In fiction, the 'Big Three' remain undisturbed after four decades of pre-eminence. During the last 10 years, however, they have but marginally added to the corpus of their creative work: from Anand, one more novel, *Confession of a Lover* (1976); from Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* (1977); and from Raja Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* (1976).

When *Private Life of an Indian Prince* came out in a new edition in 1970, with Saros Cowasjee's Introduction drawing attention to certain autobiographical elements in the novel, it was possible to read it anew as the paradigmatic transformation of these events in Anand's life: the divorce from his first wife, the betrayal by the hill-women, the memory of the Prince (Anand's ex-pupil) who had become mad, and other flotsam and jetsam of the subconscious sea of memory. After three legal marriages, Victor the Prince is fatally drawn to Ganga the hill-woman who becomes his Cleopatra, his Messalina, his 'dark lady', his flawed paradise, his sugared hell his ultimate doom. Between the Prince and the hill-woman, "two bad people who made a pair", who is the criminal, who is the victim? Being a clinical specialist, the novelist isn't afraid of handling the ulcers and the wounds; but he is a man of compassion also, a recorder who wears the yoke of pity, and this grace is denied to neither of the protagonists. The third important character is Indira the Tikyali Rani, who is merely shown on one occasion and withdrawn, but it is her love that abides with the Prince till the end. Nobody can predict the possibilities of human nature. A novelist like Anand *sees*, and we are grateful to be able to see with his eyes.

Of the projected 7-volume autobiographical novel, *Seven Summers* reconstructs the first 7 years of "my own half conscious boyhood" (say from the age of 4 to 10, or from 1908 to 1914). *Morning Face*, which won the Sahitya Akademi award, is about Krishan's school-going boyhood. The third novel, *Confession of a Lover*, covers Krishan's college life in Amritsar from 1921 to 1925. His journey through experience to youth is packed with ardour and excitement, suffering and fulfilment. He is involved in studies and politics, poetry and love; he makes a dash to Bombay, where he meets B. G. Horniman; he gains the friendship of Iqbal the poet; and he falls

in love with Yasmin a Muslim girl married to a much older man. The course of Krishan's and Yasmin's love doesn't flow smooth, and after the brief felicity on the banks of the Beas, stark tragedy follows. Krishan gives up thoughts of suicide and instead decides, on Iqbal's advice, to leave for UK for higher studies. Krishan's first five years in UK are to be the subject of the fourth novel, *The Bubble*.

In R. K. Narayan's latest novel, *The Painter of Signs*, we are back in the here-here growing town of Malgudi, with Market Road exploding with traffic, and every vestige of 'modernity' invading our consciousness. We have seemingly come a long way from the Malgudi of *Swami and Friends*, and from Savitri of *The Dark Room*—through Rosie of *The Guide*—to Daisy of *The Painter of Signs*. But though much is changed, somehow the deeper ethos of Malgudi defies change. Young Raman lives with his aunt, and proud of his calligraphy and artistic sense, he makes a sort of living by painting signboards of all kinds. At his expert touch, an institution, an enterprise, acquires an identity and a name. Now Daisy, who runs a Family Planning Clinic in Malgudi, makes her presence felt in the town and the environing villages as a hot-gospeller spreading the new message, and explaining the why and how without mincing matters in the least. Couples are free to have sex, or to forego it; once it was thought that having sex had consequences. The new gospel is that, through 'techniques' and pills and preventives, the consequences can be avoided. This may be worldly sense, but introduces an element of crass animality and cold calculation into the relations between the sexes. Narayan probes the problem with his painless clinical dexterity and lays bare the self-deceptions involved with consummate skill. In Malgudi's space, it is inevitable that Raman and Daisy should meet and become friends and get involved in situations instinct with the comic and the absurd. Daisy is quite a vivacious creature, but with her desire for independence and anxiety to avoid entanglements, she can hardly throw in her lot with Raman. And as for the Family Planning campaign, well, there's little that even Daisy can do to make it click.

Raja Rao's *Comrade Kirillov*, having earlier made its bow in a French translation in 1965, came out at last in 1976. It is the story of Padmanabhan Iyer, who lives in the West from 1928 to 1947,

and by his Czech wife, Irene, has a son, Kamal. The story is narrated in the main by Iyer's friend R (Raja Rao). The relationship between Iyer and R is analogous to that between Kirillov and Shatov in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. Iyer is a Communist and rejects Indian values, but this is only on the surface. Deep within, there is the conflict between the New and the Old. During the 2nd world war, Iyer as a Communist adopts an anti-'Quit India' stance, and Irene dies in childbirth, leaving Kamal behind. From Irene's Diary (Part II of the novel), it is clear that Irene had penetrated through Iyer's mask and seen his elemental love for India. She feels that India will eat him up; and all his Indianness will rise up once he touches the soil of India, and all his seeming occidental veneer will turn into European hatred. After the War, Iyer disappears behind the Communist Iron Curtain, but Kamal joins his grandparents in India. Later R takes Kamal to Kanya Kumari, and India becomes identified with Parvati the Eternal Virgin. The story is not without interest, but the political, philosophical and mystical overtones are apt to cloud the clarity of the human framework. What is the truth about Padmanabhan Iyer? Irene sees only the in-eterate Indian in him, while R sees him sold over to an alien ideology. But Iyer himself perhaps feels caught between contradictory pulls, orthodoxy and modernism, Gandhism and Communism, inner certitude and outer frenzy. And is the leap into East Europe a gesture of despair, or a Hope for the future? As in *The Serpent and the Rope*, in *Comrade Kirillov* also Raja Rao's deeper intention seems to be to show that, for an Indian, 'holy wedded love' is impossible with a European wife however unexceptionable otherwise; and again, an Indian's attempt to forge a life of fulfilment outside the motherland is foredoomed to failure, whatever the other attractions and inducements of the adopted country. Raja Rao is reported to be engaged on a major work in progress, and one eagerly awaits its publication.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978), coming as it does 12 years after *Shadow of Ladakh*, is a dismal disappointment. Doubtless Bhattacharya is exploiting the current fashion for 'god-men', and also drawing upon his years in Hawaii. Swami Yogananda, Professor turned Yogi, is in Hawaii to preach Indian philosophy. But Hawaii is Hawaii, and spiritual and sex hungers easily coalesce.

And Yoga teams with Big Business! For Walter Gregson, the

prophet of permissiveness, "the bed . . . was a key symbol for the new American", and he goads his latest mistress, Sylvia, to attempt to seduce Yogananda. Walter's poem on a Dead Rat—"A dead rat stinking under the nylon rug"—seems to be symbolic of the theme and odour of the novel. The Swami's admirers, however, plan to set up the Yogananda Oversoul Institute which is to propagate, not only universal religion in terms of the Vedanta, but also to tackle in practical terms inner tensions including the exorcising of evil spirits! Stella, Jennifer (with her casual affairs with hotel vagrants and shoeshine boys), Dr. Vincent the culture-vulture with his furtive visits to x-rated films, and others sponsor the Institute. But the obsessive memory of Devjani, once his student, and the sexual assault by Sylvia, unnerve Yogananda, who precipitately flies back to India. In Hawaii, besides Yogananda's Vedanta, other cults like Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, tantra-left-handed, Kama-Sutra-as-Gita, also have their followers. After doling out aberrations and futilities, the novel more or less whimpers to a close, leaving a trail of desecration behind. And yet the newest trend in USA is Purpose-Faith-Direction, and not this Sex-promiscuity-satiety. It is time the "dead rat stinking under the nylon rug" were cast away, and the whole place cleansed and fumigated.

Manohar Malgonkar's recent work in fiction is hardly more satisfying. Potboilers like *Spy in Amber* and *Shalimar* can never be taken seriously. In *Open Seasons* (1978), however, there are hints of the old Malgonkar, although this novel too was first made as a film-script. The 'brain drain' motif is topical enough, but the vicissitudes of Jai Kumar's flirtation with America and of his emotional entanglements with Kate and Neela fail to fuse into a work of creative imagination. Malgonkar's earlier novels, *Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges*, showed that his sense of history was as strong as his flair for story-telling, and it is not surprising that he has now turned to history and historical biography (see Section VI).

Kamala Markandaya has been able to sustain the tempo of her earlier creativity. *The Nowhere Man* (1973), while thematically it connects with other studies of coloured immigrants in UK like Anita Desai's *Bye-bye, Blackbird*, Timeri Murari's *The Marriage*, V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, Dilip Hero's *A Triangular View* and Jamila and Reginald Massey's *The Immigrants*, is also a frightening study in human decay. Old age in a foreign country progressively

plasters Srinivas with the attendant disabilities—loneliness, rootlessness, nostalgic memory of his youth in India and of the middle years in England, and a sense of despair at one's non-achievement. Having left India for political reasons, Srinivas had made good, and lived with Vasantha his wife. The younger son dies in World War II, the elder lives separately with his English wife, and Vasantha is no more. After his more comfortable days in UK, it is now that Srinivas has to face the rigours of racial discrimination which upset him greatly. Added to all this, he contracts leprosy, and the novel mutters through tight lips the grim walk of Srinivas towards the beckoning doom. Perhaps Srinivas *can* be cured and certified as a burnt-out case by modern medicine, But that *other* leprosy, racial hate—who can guarantee a complete cure for it?

A speech.

An explosion.

Lethal dust from the deliberate detonation, sly little ugly globules, hung suspended in the atmosphere.

Kamala Markandaya's style is as competent and resilient as ever, neat phrases dovetailed into one another, sardonic and compassionate by turns, often building up a memorable image. Thus for example Srinivas, too long in the West, goaded into buying 5, Ashcroft Avenue by Vasantha's insistence:

So long as they were mobile, he liked to believe the way back to India, from which events and people had driven them, lay open. In his innermost recesses he accepted that this might not be so: each year that went by laid its mark, ineffaceable rings upon the bark of his children, making it increasingly difficult for them to thrive in another climate; and the passing years too, inexorably decimated, leaving fewer members of families upon whom the tendrils of new life could be twined. .

Here the tortured psychology of a whole class of people—an ever increasing number!—who find themselves sucked into the 'brain drain' or 'brawn drain' has been revealed at once with a painstaking honesty and a deep compassion.

Two Virgins (1974), Kamala Markandaya's 7th novel, is about two village girls, the sisters Lalitha and Saroja, the elder running after a film Director and coming to grief, and the younger (Saroja) moving from innocence to experience by living through the family's

traumatic experience. The sisters are neatly contrasted, but while Lalitha's is the budget of experiences, it is Saroja's consciousness that observes, considers, weighs and places the developing events. But the novel is rather a slight thing, not on a par with Markandaya's best work. Her next novel, *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), is however a major effort. A historical novel, it covers in some detail the period from late 19th century to the post first world war period. The novel provokes comparison with Malgonkar's *Princes* and Anand's *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, but the canvas is larger. The scene is Devapur, and the action embraces the times of Bawajiraj II and III, and of the latter's natural son, the rebel Rabi. Although admiring his father, under his mother Mohini's and his Pandit's influence Rabi rejects his princely destiny, befriends Janaki the gardener's daughter, and leads the people's protest. Two other women also come under his sway, Sophie the daughter of Sir Arthur Copeland the British Representative, and Usha, daughter of the Brahmin Diwan, Tirumala Rao. And the end? The wind of change is unmistakable, Britain's historic role must come to an end. Ring out the old, ring in the new: an end and a beginning: Britain's honourable withdrawal, and India's 'tryst with destiny'!

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala creates difficulties for her Indian readers and critics. She has defiantly declared, "My husband is Indian, and so are my children. I am not, and less so every year" (*London Magazine*, Sept. 1970). One might, however, include her novels among her children, and in that sense her fiction is Indian. She has been dividing her time between creative fiction and film-scripting, between (as she has confessed) the "silence, exile and cunning" (James Joyce's formula) that the former demands and the "glare of publicity" under which films have to be produced. The feeling has been expressed by one of her admirers, Yasmine Gooneratne, that Mrs. Jhabvala's "finely drawn literary effects" have been "lost on the Indian reading public" (*JIWE*, Jan.-July 1980, p. 179). If by this it is meant that the "Indian reading public" is perhaps too coarse to appreciate Mrs. Jhabvala's "finely drawn literary effects", the insinuation is unfortunate. Strictly as a fact, Mrs. Jhabvala has received due critical attention (for example, see earlier: Chapter XXI, pp. 450-61) in India: and V.A. Shahane's full-length study has lately appeared, in which he has adequately covered both

the phases of her career, the one dominated by the comic mode and the other by the ironic. Mrs. Jhabvala's recent work includes *An Experience of India* (1971), a collection of stories oozing with bitterness, and *A New Dominion* (1972) and *Heat and Dust* (1975). Yasmine Gooneratne thinks that Mrs. Jhabvala's experience with the films *Bombay Talkie* (1970) and *Autobiography of a Prince* (1975) respectively influenced the writing of the novels *A New Dominion* and *Heat and Dust*. Clearly, the filmic mode (Dr. Jekyll) is on the ascendant. "It is fun to tumble about with them (noise and light and clowns) for a while. Only, afterwards to go back where one belongs . . . that's not always so easy" (*The Illustrated Weekly*, 21 March 1971: quoted by Yasmine Gooneratne). That's what Dr. Jekyll found, and that seems to be Mrs. Jhabvala's predicament too.

Four new novels and a collection of short stories, all of a high level of inspiration and execution, are to Anita Desai's credit. *Bye-bye, Blackbird* (1971), her third novel, highlights the problem of the coloured in UK, often complicated by inter-racial marriages (like Adit-Sarah's), and Anita Desai herself has called it, "of all my novels . . . the most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation". In the fourth novel, *Where shall we go this Summer* (1975)—a novel that has been compared with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Margaret Attwood's *Surfacing* (1972) and even Shakespeare's *The Tempest*—the heroine, who is in her fifth pregnancy, leaves her husband in a mood of unease to seek peace in an island, Manori, off Bombay where her father had once reigned as the local Patriarch. Strangely enough, the heroine is named Sita, and her husband is Raman! The novel is admirably structured in 3 Parts: from Monsoon 1967 (or the present), Sita travels back to Winter 1947; and after thesis and antithesis have confronted each other in the inner theatre of her consciousness and the necessary revaluations have been made, she is back in the present to forge the dialectical synthesis. Sita knows full well that Manori has changed, and is certainly unacceptable to her children. And, after all, some understanding with Raman and the world of Bombay is possible. Sita neither kills, nor commits suicide; she doesn't go mad either; she sees all, and endures.

In the sixth novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), which won the Sahitya Akademi award, the scene shifts to Kasauli on the Simla

Hills. The central characters are three: Nanda Kaul, her great-granddaughter Rakha, and Nanda's old friend, Ila Dass. These three, although physically near to one another, live in their separate lonelinesses making but feeble and vain attempts to establish bridgeheads of understanding. Nanda and Rakha both hug their privacy, and as for Nanda and Ila, lacking total sincerity, every move for understanding is for them only a new exercise in frustration. With her practised ease, Anita Desai explores sensibility again, and reveals lights and shadows alike. Ila's work as Welfare Officer among the villagers brings her into conflict with Preet, who waylays and criminally assaults her. On receipt of the phone message about the rape and the death, Nanda dies of shock, and Rakha presently returns to the now tenantless house. The central chapters that describe Rakha's self-finding through the exploration of the hillside are the best in the book, and Nanda's and Ila's viperous sense of loneliness and alienation is also brought out convincingly. The supreme irony is that Nanda with all her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the unmarried Ila equally feel utterly lonely, which perhaps is meant to show up the futility of living, married or single. This strikes the reader with even greater force in the next novel.

In *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Tara who is married to a successful diplomat and is the mother of two charming daughters is nevertheless gnawed by a corrosive sense of failure, since she has been of little help to her problem-ridden parental home. On the other hand, her sister, Bim, unmarried, a lecturer in a Delhi College, has sacrificed herself to the drudgery of looking after a mad aunt and a brother who has refused to grow up. The other brother, the poetry-quoting Raja, has married a Muslim and gone away. *Clear Light of Day* describes Tara's visit to her parental home rich with childhood memories, the stirring of the putrid drain of the unconscious, the sudden insights, the nameless regrets. With Bim, it was a question of somebody having to shoulder the family responsibilities, and circumstances have made her do it. Tara's coming now for a holiday and their unsatisfactory conversations are only a needless scrubbing for Bim's bruised heart. Only, she cannot forgive Raja—but there is no hatred either. Bim impatiently pines for the reopening of the College, so that she may once more lose herself in routine, schedules, time-tables, rules, analyses. It has

been a strain almost, Tara's visit and the conversations!

Here we are, then; life as we live it, once we pierce through the glitter of seeming success and layers of sophistication, the armour of vain self-deceiving and cloak of hypocrisy, life is a pitifully painful and futile affair. Such a view would appear to be integral to Anita Desai's art. As she confessed sometime ago, aside from the passion to explore the true significance of things, "it is style that interests me most—and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting language and symbol, word and rhythm . . . one must find a way to unite the inner and outer rhythms". Anita Desai's carefully forged style is all aristocratic elegance, poetry, the gazing into silvery snails and fallen rose petals, the close-up of blue veins running within a marble-white skin, the cycle of seasons and the music of the cicadas. And it is in her short stories (*Games at Twilight, and Other Stories*, 1978) that her style shows to even more advantage than in the novels. For a style like hers, the essential ingredients are childhood memories (especially of the mysterious rites of growing up) and a heart that is forever calling out to the other side of a rushing stream. As we remain mesmerised by Anita Desai's verbal artistry and her uncanny evocation of atmosphere, her tale unfalteringly glides by and we force a rendition of the veil of a happening or a memory to gain entry into the realm of personal experience and attain the desired finale of acceptance.

In Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Simrit, her divorced husband, Som, and Raj her friend whom she marries in the end, form the tripod on which the novel uncomfortably pants for life. The terms of the harsh divorce settlement are part of the theme of the novel, but neither the reasons for the divorce nor the consent terms quite carry conviction. Raj is presented as a double contrast to the ex-husband and Sumer Singh the go-getter politician, and Som's harsh divorce terms to Simrit are paralleled by the economically and politically ruinous terms of the oil agreement with Russia promoted by Sumer Singh. But again, if Sumer has his mistress Pixie, Raj has had his Sheila. In the general murkiness of the atmosphere of the novel, neither Simrit nor Raj radiates much credibility, and the other characters are more shadowy still. The political slant of the novel consists in Sumer's maladroit success with the oil deal and his elevation to the External Affairs Ministry. As in her earlier novels (*This Time of Morning* and

Storm in Chandigarh), Mrs. Sahgal's flair for politics may be seen exemplified here too, and the feel of present-day Delhi, the pace of change, the passing of Gandhism, the defiant amorality of the Jet set, the new style of politics, the chronic sense of uncertainty, all may be inferred from the pages of the novel. It is evident the novel has grown out of some personal trauma or bitterness, but the personal hasn't been wholly consumed by the universal. The novel begins as it ends, with a party at the Inter-Continental Hotel where talk and wine both flow freely.

Once again, in *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), the background is politics, thus providing some continuity or enveloping unity to the main corpus of Mrs. Sahgal's novels. Following the death of the charismatic Prime Minister, Shivaraj, his sister Devi is inducted into the new Cabinet as Education Minister. While her son, Rishad, is involved in violence (apparently 'naxalite'), Devi veers emotionally between Usman (Delhi's Vice-Chancellor) and Michael, an Englishman engaged on a biography of the late Prime Minister. The novel jumbles student activism and violence, political uncertainty and infighting, and petty brazen sensuality and bestiality. Historical parallels are indicated, but not elaborated. The strength of the novel, as of its predecessors, is Mrs. Sahgal's uncanny understanding of the ambiguous and sinister rumblings in the corridors of power in New Delhi. If in the earlier novels we witness the collapse of Gandhism, now it is the rapid scuttling of Nehruism as well. Even so, it is about the pre-Emergency period "when options were still possible"

Arun Joshi, whose first novel *The Foreigner* was warmly received on its appearance, published his second, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* in 1971. If the first novel explored the problems of "detachment and involvement, indifference and commitment, going it alone and communion", in the second, Billy's crucial decision takes him away from his wife, family, friends and the old way of life itself. In short, Biswas retreats from civilisation and loses himself among the Adivasis, lives with an Adivasi girl Bilasia, and is revered as a god by the tribals. The interesting fact is that it is his training in USA as an anthropologist that has turned him to this path! Almost imperceptibly we are led away from the law of the jungle that prevails in the world of sophistication to the trembling humanism that reigns in the heart of the jungle. Arun

Joshi does indeed handle this ambitious and difficult theme with assured competence and sensibility, and the 'strange case' of Billy (Bimal) Biswas only proves that there is a little of Billy in all of us, a desire to get away from it all, do something 'reckless', or surrender to some extraordinary obsession. Confronted by such a situation, what does organised society do? Well, Billy is neatly disposed of, "in the only manner that a human society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers"; he is snuffed out, that's all.

In *The Apprentice* (1974), Ratan Rathor makes a brief daily escape from one world to another, both co-existing in modern Delhi. Ratan is a civil servant in his late forties with a wife and daughter, and a car too, but every morning on his way to office, he spends some time on the steps of a temple wiping the shoes of the devotees within, but doesn't actually enter the temple. What's the reason behind this daily ritual? The story is slowly and compulsively unfolded in the classic 'Ancient Mariner' fashion in spasmodic bouts of confessional reminiscence, the recipient of the confidence (the wedding guest!) being a college student, one of those whose shoes Ratan periodically polishes. Arun Joshi's is an admirable writing craft, and Ratan's terrible history comes out in all its nastiness and pity and terror and fatality. Scion of a noble family, son of a Gandhian patriot and martyr, Ratan comes to Delhi during the second world war, undergoes privations, gets into Government service—and now, step by step, his character undergoes a coarsening, he dons docility and obsequiousness, he makes 'deals' (even in choosing his wife), and he gets on and on. With freedom come opportunities of quick advancement, but Ratan is also exposed to corrupting influences. Just before the Chinese war in 1962, Ratan takes a bribe (although he doesn't really 'need' that money), and his action in passing a consignment of useless armament results in the death of hundreds of our soldiers on the front, and the suicide of his best friend, the Brigadier. Ratan could have saved the Brigadier, but he wouldn't. Later, Ratan learns that he had actually been made a victim—one of thousands!—of a conspiracy involving the evil trio that "incidentally runs the country" (the trio consisting of the Minister concerned, his Secretary and Himman Singh the ruthless business operator). Now in the consciousness that he has sunk as low as garbage, Ratan remembers his father again, and decides to work out his self-rehabilitation; and

this apprenticeship in shoe shining is a beginning, and may lead to the cleansing of the layers of dirt covering his soul. As a fictional study of the anatomy and dynamics of the almost omnipresent corruption in the country, *The Apprentice* is a powerful indictment. The human story and the stark message both come through.

Then, after a long interval, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), about a plastic magnate and millionaire. Arun Joshi's heroes—Sindi Oberoi, Billy, Ratan, Som Bhasker—are all 'outsiders' after a fashion, making desperate attempts to silence the insidious bug within and reach a rapport with the world. One tries to flee himself, another his home and class, a third his shameful past, and the fourth (Som) the furies within. With each novel the hero seems to get older, and the novels are thus a single "work in progress", for the protagonists suffer from the same disease, "discontent and discontent" (as with Ratan and his wife), and this more or less becomes a way of life. Inhabiting as they do the gas-chambers of their own self-forged misery, the heroes (for all their wealth, power or sophistication) still suffer because they lack the deeper poise of the spirit. "What is more shattering", asks Ratan, "than the collapse of faith?"

Som Bhasker, married to Geeta and the father of 2 children, meets enigmatic Anuradha who lives in Benares with the decadent Aftab, and wants to possess the woman and buy the man's business. Som partly succeeds in both, but catastrophically fails in the end. *The Last Labyrinth* is the story of Som's misadventure with his dark and terrible love, and the 'labyrinth' symbolism is spread out thick all over. Lal Haveli, Aftab's "sepulchral, sensual den", is located "amidst the labyrinths of Benares". There are labyrinthine rooms and passages, but what is the 'last' labyrinth? "Why, death of course!" Is the 'labyrinth' a make-believe or a trap of fatality? Certainly, Som is caught in the interstices of the mysterious web, the flight of steps to Gargi Mata's room is a labyrinth too, and there is a labyrinth in the tobacco-stand house on the hills. Like Som, the reader also feels caught in the labyrinth. In Arun Joshi's writing, there is the fusion of intellect, nervous energy and integrity; and this stylistic competence is pressed into service to describe Som's half-hysterical half-fatalistic pursuit of Anuradha—losing her, gaining her, and losing her again. Besides Som and Anuradha, there is Aftab, his Azizum, and his factotum, Tarakki; and there is

the god-woman Gargi, and 'Krishna' the unpredictable God. What does happen in the end? Evidently, Anuradha (like Sarah in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*) saves Som from certain death by vowing to Gargi to give up her lover altogether. A grand renunciation! When in spite of all warnings Som returns to Haveli, she tells him hoarsely: "You don't know these people. Things could happen to you . . ." When Som returns from his hotel the next morning, he is told that Anuradha had disappeared. The police (to whom Som makes a complaint) wander through the mazes, and find nothing. *The Last Labyrinth* is almost a paradigm of the contemporary diseased world where discontents grow their own pestilential vapours, and self-doomed humanity—lacking faith, lacking Grace—is tragically resigned to being suffocated by them in the 'Last Labyrinth'. The promised sequel will, perhaps, take us out of the tunnel and the labyrinth to glimpse the new Light.

VI

FICTION II

Talking of modern Indo-Anglian fiction, Anita Desai is reported to have told her interviewer, Atma Ram: "There is so little of it . . . There simply isn't enough, in the sense of variety, value, interest, significance" (JIWE, July 1977). This is substantially true, for compared with the thousands of new novels and collections of short stories published annually in UK and USA, the fifty or less appearing here every year must almost pale into insignificance. On the other hand, there are more Indo-Anglian fiction writers today than 25 years ago, and this trend seems likely to continue. The literary awards—there are as yet not enough of them—highlight achievement and bring the chosen to national attention, and this again creates an atmosphere favourable to aspirant writers.

Of the novelists whose work appeared first in the seventies, the most outstanding is Chaman Nahal. No doubt his collection of short stories, *The Weird Dance*, came out in 1965, and his excellent critical study of the Narrative Pattern in Ernest Hemingway's novels, not long after. As for the novels, five have made their bow in quick succession: *My True Faces* (1973), *Azadi* (1975), *Into*

Another Dawn (1977), *The English Queens* (1979) and *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981). Of these, *My True Faces* located in Delhi, concerns Kamal and Malti, and unfolds an intestine quarrel between two families. *Into Another Dawn* swings between India and USA—between Ravi Sharma's tradition-bound Brahmin household in Haridwar and a similar household in USA. Ravi meets Irene, and as the scene shifts, the narrative achieves an evocation of diverse places (Long Island, Princeton, New York, Springfield, Woodstock), and after a brief interim of felicity with Irene, Ravi returns home. Dear India is India, and exotic America is America; and yet human beings everywhere are the same in the raw and in their souls. While indicating the differences, Chaman Nahal hints also at the possibilities of transcendence "into another Dawn". *The English Queens* is another kind of novel altogether, observant, ironic, satirical, a brilliantly engineered expose of the urban-centered upper middle class (the 'UM'-class) Indians who still ape the speech and mores of the sometime ruling English class in India. What Nirad Chaudhuri has done in the withering prose of *The Continent of Circe*, Chaman Nahal has done no less devastatingly through the medium of fiction.

Azadi which won the Sahitya Akademi award, is about the partition of India that held the subcontinent in a nightmare of horror for months and left a trail of phenomenal bitterness and misery. Even at this distance of time, the wounds bleed afresh at the prod of memory. Like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, *Azadi* too is done, not on the scale of a *War and Peace*, but with rigorous and resolved selectiveness. Nahal concentrates on Lala Kanshi Ram's family, but the mind can and does, like a computer, multiply the horror and the pity a million fold, and try to get at the measure of the total holocaust Suicide, forced conversion, resigned acceptance, precipitate flight, muted despair—all the varieties of the horror of the times—are projected in the novel. As between Hindu and Muslim, Nahal has meted out even-handed justice, and a character like Barkat Ali is even more convincing than Rahatullah Khan. Madhu and Chandni are clearly typical of thousands, and Sunanda, poor wounded soul, makes the final gesture of endurance in the novel. And Lalaji and Prabhas Rani are not untypical of the children of Bharata Mata, who is visibly the Mother of Sorrows, but potentially Bhavani Bharati as well.

Lala Kanshi Ram of Sialkot, garrulous and proud, suddenly finds his world in a shambles. His beloved daughter is a victim of the riots, and he treks towards Delhi with his wife and son. Although wounded in the spirit, he is a moral support to all as the convoy moves towards the Indian border. There is a controlled tension in Nahal's narratives and it often reminds the reader of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Nahal's own envenomed memories as a victim of the Partition have not, however, warped his sensibilities. *Azadi* indeed lives at many levels—political, religious, social, cultural, historical—and certain images haunt the reader: Niranjan Singh, straight as a sword, committing self-immolation; Sunanda's fierce gesture of defiance confronting Inayat Ullah, threatening to kill him should he touch her; Isher Kaur's giving birth to a daughter in the refugee train just as another refugee train passes it by creeping towards Pakistan full of the dead and dying. It is hardly possible to exorcise these images away. Nahal describes this nightmarish trek from Sialkot to Delhi with compelling vividness, and the excruciating details are sometimes reminiscent of the retreat from Moscow in Tolstoy's great novel.

Azadi is about mid-1947, the months of the Partition horrors exploded by the criminally short-sighted British rulers and (even more) by our own 'national' leaders afflicted with sudden blindness and loss of nerve. This horrendous catastrophe, however, was only the final Act of a vaster dramatic sequence, say like *The Dynasts* of Thomas Hardy. Although the history of India's struggle for freedom could begin with the 'War of Indian Independence' of 1857, or the 'Bande Mataram' agitation after the turn of the century, it is more convenient to begin with Gandhiji's return to India by *S.S. Arabia* in 1915; and the Gandhian Age (1915-1948) is also our latter day 'Heroic Age' whose crests were in the early twenties and the launching of non-cooperation; the early thirties and the salt satyagraha; and the early forties and the 'Quit India' conflagration. Chaman Nahal's *The Crown and the Loincloth* focuses on the first of the 3 peak periods of the Gandhian Age, and is perhaps designed as the first part of a massive trilogy on the Gandhian Heroic Age. But undivided India was large, and the actors in the national drama were so many, and the incidents so multifarious. The novelist's problem is to fasten upon the microcosm and convincingly suggest the infinitudes of the macrocosm,

thereby fusing the personal (or human), the heroic (or Gandhian) and the wider national perspectives into a unified whole. With a sure artistic instinct, Nahal has tried to make Ajitha and Shanti Nath's family prototypical as it were of the Indian subcontinent. Ajitha is Nahal's Kanthapura (but with a difference), and the non-cooperation movement was the same, whether in Lahore, Lucknow, Jabalpur, Belgaum or Salem. Again, with sure instinct, Nahal makes a rough sort of Gandhi-Sunil equation. Shanti Nath's fourth son, Sunil is drawn to Gandhi (like Moorthy in *Kanthapura*). Sunil is confessedly 'ordinary'; Gandhi claims to be even more ordinary. And both make discoveries while stumbling all the time. It is verily the story of the transmutation of the ordinary into the heroic and extraordinary (and Sunil's end is almost a foretaste of what Gandhiji's is going to be). Perhaps there is also an implied parallelism between Kasturba Gandhi and Sunil's wife, Kusum. The whole strategy of the novel, then, is to link the ordinary and the extraordinary, and from the clearly etched foreground to the infinitely suggestive vistas in the background. Altogether, the variety of character and action, the mingling of the historical with the fictional, the play of the tragic, ironic and the farcical, and the moving multiplicity of scene and incident, all succeed in making the novel a forceful recordation of the first of the three great phases of the Age of Gandhi. The writing is resilient, nervous, adequate; there are no angularities, no laboured flourishes or intrusive journalistic explications. And the Rehana-Sunil riddle-exchanges add a welcome romantic piquancy to the narrative, and Rehana herself is a unique creation, a creature of intellect and emotion and tragic fatality.

The late Rama Mehta's first novel, *Inside the Haveli* (1977) won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1979. The heroine, Geeta, moves from the large freedom of Bombay, where she had received her education, to the sheltered prison-like security of an aristocratic 'haveli' in Udaipur. Her husband teaches at the local university, but is not unconscious of the attractions of Delhi. Within the Haveli, all is tradition-bound, and while this means strength and security, it also means isolation and stagnation. But things change even at the Haveli, for although Geeta gradually gets used to its life changing herself in the process, she also subtly changes her immediate environment and the people concerned. In

the end, she becomes the mistress of the Haveli, feeling a pride in what is best in the family tradition and trying in other respects to make the Haveli community of relatives and dependants move with the times, making sure of each forward step. *Inside the Haveli* is a sensitive piece of realistic fiction, even an authentic sociological study, and it is written with a naturalness and poise that are disarming and effective at once. The evocation of scene, character and especially of atmosphere is almost uncanny. Covering a period of 15 years, the novel is properly structured into three roughly equal Parts. The balance between repose and movement is well sustained, there is romance but no cheap sex, there is tension but no violence, and there is a feeling for the values and the verities.

One of the sensational literary events of 1981 was the publication (in UK and USA) of the Indian-born Salman Rushdie's over-size novel, *Midnight's Children*, which has since won the Booker award as well as the James Tait Black memorial prize. The title of course refers to the children born in the midnight hour of India's "tryst with Destiny" on 15 August 1947. The narrator-hero, Saleem Sinai, is one of the elect 580 children scarred by the time of their nativity with an exceptional fate. As he recalls his antecedents and also projects his and the Indian subcontinent's history till the time of the Emergency (1975-77), the spread of the novel is about six decades, and spatially all India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh. Saleem's is an ordinary-extraordinary life, and since it is to be viewed in its exponential ramifications, we have in the novel a projection of the multitudinous opulence and variegatedness of life in India, the squalor, confusion, exasperation, and equally the vitality, charity and silent heroism of the millions. The massive novel has a three Part structure with 30 chapters: Part I going back to Jallianwalla Bagh and ending with the birth of Saleem Sinai, the narrator-hero, on the fateful midnight of 15 August 1947; Part II concluding with the end of the Indo-Pakistan war on 23 September 1965; and Part III carrying the narrative forward to March 1977, and the end of the Emergency. The immediately striking feature of the novel is the prose style, a phenomenon of extreme whimsicality and evocative power, as also of the surrealistic touched now and then by the beautiful and occasionally even by the tints of the sublime. The style is the man, and Saleem is Salman, and this India that is their India is

also everybody's India, and not simply that of the venomous operators, the political racketeers and the princelings of thuggery. Like Rabelais, like Gunter Grass, like G.V. Desani, Rushdie too lets himself go, jumbles the categories, *rasas* and *dhwanis*, and tumbles orient and occident, Hindu and Muslim, saint and sinner; and his style, like his matter, partakes of the maddening kaleidoscopic of India today. The historical actors flit through the pages, and sometimes whole paragraphs read like pedestrian journalistic reportage. And all this idiot's tale of sound and fury reaches its crescendo during the Emergency, the mass vasectomies, and tubectomies, the cumulative drain of all hope! If any clue is needed to grasp the meaning of the fantasy, it is the charade of 'snakes and ladders', and so we fall (in Robert Browning's words) but to rise, are baffled to fight better, and sleep to wake, and for every snake that pulls you down there is a ladder to lift you up, and *vice versa*. It is not easy to 'place' so unusual a work as *Midnight's Children*, but at the very least it is an impressive tour-de-force.

A few more writers of fiction—most of them 'new arrivals', many (as yet) one-novel authors—may now be briefly commented upon. In Timeri Murari's *The Marriage* (1973), the theme is the problem of the coloured immigrant in UK and his quest for identity with his new homeland. The action takes place in a small industrial town, and while Tekchand, a sweeper in a factory, is widely respected by the local Indian community, it is the unscrupulous Harbans who gets jobs for newcomers and for this gets initial donations and monthly tributes, adding up to a total of £ 3000 easy money per year. An attempt is made by the idealistic English steward Roy and the stolid Tekchand to end these unholy exactions, but before it could succeed, Harbans blackmails Tekchand into minding his own business. Tekchand's daughter, Leela, is involved in a love affair with Roger, but her brother fights and wounds the boy who has to be rushed off to the hospital. Harbans smooths things over, Tekchand takes Leena back to India to be married off, and Roy is left alone to continue the war against Harbans. The few Indian characters in the novel come out alive, and being a miscellany rather than a close-knit community, they become prisoners of their helplessness and precariousness. They are not of course all of a piece, and their troubles are self-wrought as well as engendered by the majority white community. The generation gap,

again, is as wide as the chasm between the white and the coloured, and it all arises from the failure of understanding and love. But while the sociological slant is important enough, it is nevertheless the Leena-Roger romance that is the heart of the novel.

Critic and playwright, M. V. Rama Sarma's first novel, *The Stream*, appeared 25 years ago. His more recent fiction comprises *The Farewell Party* (1971), *Look Homeward* (1976) and *The Bliss of Life* (1979). In *The Farewell Party*, Prof. Prakasam reminisces, just before attending the farewell party on the eve of his retirement, about all the yesterdays of his life as a householder and as a teacher. Take it all in all, for all the disappointments and frustrations, for all the politics of the campus, it has been a life of fulfilment. *Look Homeward* is yet another story revolving round the "brain drain", and the Indian abroad is exhorted to go back to his country and serve the Mother. The characters are etched with a few bold strokes, and there is no ambiguity about the message which stridently comes through. *The Bliss of Life* is a fictional biography of the celebrated Andhra composer, Kshetrappa, and the novel convincingly projects the evolution of Varada the lover and poet into Kshetrappa the musician-saint. And an age, an ethos, a way of life, and the arts of song and dance of the time are all called back to life in simple but moving language.

Critic of Mulk Raj Anand's novels, Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* (1974) tells the story of an Anglo-Indian, Tristan, who had done his higher studies in England, played with promiscuous sex for a time, married Elsa and moved to Canada as an academic. The novel gives interesting glimpses of campus life, including the intrigues of the Faculty Wives' Club. Tristan tires of Elsa and their child, retires to a farm house, doles out his autobiography to Marie the store-keeper's daughter, and continually thinks and talks of committing suicide. It is an unpleasant and rather unconvincing tale of the hapless grouching of a gloomy one-eyed Don.

The aetiology and dubious predicament of a 'god-man' is the theme of S. P. Mani's short novel, *In Person* (1976). Since his early years of adolescence in an orphanage when he veered between bouts of precocious Puranic learning and unbridled pornographic fantasies, Prabhu has come far indeed even before his fortieth year. Having failed to win the favours of his boyhood flame, Bhuma, Prabhu spends some years on the mountains in the north and fifteen on the

plains accumulating experiences. These include a few 'miracles'—a cripple learning to walk, a dumb boy learning to speak, and so on. Prabhu is frankly puzzled, but words pass round that he is a wonder-worker, and he feels trapped; he is like a half-frightened man riding on a tiger. When he returns to the haunts of his childhood, he is accepted and hailed as an Avatar by Bhuma and her husband, Murthy. *In Person* is Prabhu's attempt to review his life and anatomise his self, and if possible come to terms with the world. He has no illusions about himself, but then, isn't he more sinned against than sinning? The writing is often obscure, the chronology is deliberately messed up, but the style is verily of a piece with Prabhu's knotted, ambivalent and agonised personality.

Shiv K. Kumar, critic, poet and dramatist, has published a novel as well, *The Bone's Prayer* (1979). It is about Suresh Gupta, a Chandigarh junior academic, who has an affair with the promiscuous Sheila, and deceived by her, feels lost. He revives, however, after a season with Mona the understanding prostitute. Presently Suresh has an assignment in USA, and there falls in love with the divorcee Caroline. But at the first opportunity, she hops into the arms of the guitarist, Allen Rossin. This experience of a second betrayal is too much for Suresh, and he takes his life. His body is brought to India by his friend, Sunil, who tells the story. Lechery after all eats itself, and only too often the dividing line between love and lust is apt to disappear. The novel is interesting as a partial portrait—warts and all—of campus life here and elsewhere, and as a novel of an academic by an academic for the delectation of academics.

Raji Narasimhan's two novels—*The Heart of Standing is that You cannot Fly* (1973) and *Forever Free* (1979)—certainly show a talent for observation, cerebration and effective expression. The first novel with its Empsonian title is set in Delhi, and the characters are drawn from a wide middle class background, and our wretched Forsytes are often caught off their guard and mummified in these pages. *Forever Free* is touched with more sombre hues and concerns the misadventures of Shree in marriage and outside. Her arranged marriage to Swami is a failure, and so Shree leaves him and seeks solace in Madhav Rao and Carruthers, who use her and then leave her. A sadder Shree finds refuge at last in her mother's residual love. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1976) is a tale about Dimple and

her husband Amit Basu who move to New York to live in an appropriate ethnic ghetto. Her other novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, is about a Brahmin girl educated at Vassar (USA) and married to an American; but she returns to India and rediscovers the culture of her people. Of Nergis Dalal's novels, *Minari* (1967) is on life in a Rajasthani hill station involving the ex-Ruler, Tejpore, who is the apex of the eternal infamous triangle, lover: wife: husband. In *The Sisters* (1973)—which provokes comparison with Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*—the fat Rita and Nina the lean and pretty one enact the primordial game of jealousy. When Rita finds that her husband loves Nina, she drugs him to death! The third novel, *The Inner Door* (1975), is located in Sukhananda Ashram, Rishikesh, financed by Chris and Myra from USA. The fake Guru, Rahul, who is fed with comfort and sex, manages to achieve self-transcendence and attain true Guruhood. Like Narayan's *The Guide*, Bhabani's *A Dream in Hawaii* and Mani's *In Person*, Nergis Dalal's novel also is a study of the contemporary god-man phenomenon, which generally saddens more than angers us. The agony of being neither mere man nor quite superman, perhaps godly somewhere but just human most of the time, must be galling to the god-man himself. A more serious study of the phenomenon is V. K. Gokak's *Narahari: Prophet of New India* (1972), a continuation in English of his Kannada novel, *Samarasave Jeevana*. Another variation of the god-man tale is attempted by the industrial technocrat, K. Sreenivasan, whose *A Handful of Earth* (1973) describes the plausible transformation of Guruswamy, a failure as a farmer and householder, into 'Kanji Samiar', the saint and god-man who brings hope and cheer to a famine-ridden people in a south Indian village. And even after his death, he is felt as a living beneficent presence by his people.

Mrinalini Sarabhai's *This Alone is True* (1977), describes the difficulties that have to be faced by a girl of good family who desires to make dancing her career. The endemic prejudice against the profession ("the profession of harlots!") is reinforced by opposition from the husband and his family. Parvati the heroine finally decides to follow her 'inner voice', which here means rejection of her lover Chetan and his possessive mother, and the sacrifice of the joys and fulfilments of a happy marriage. While the story is told briskly enough, the characters fail to come to life. The

art of dancing is merely mentioned from time to time; it doesn't galvanise the pages. And Thatha, the old Master, is mere paste-board. It is a pity that Mrinalini's eminence as a classical dancer isn't reflected in her novel about the art.

Shashi Deshpande's first novel, *The Dark Holds no Terrors* (1980), presents an unusual character, Sarita, who defies her mother to become a Doctor, defies her caste to marry outside, and defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. Sarita and Manu had made a love marriage, but something soon went wrong. He is a failure, and she has to earn both bread and butter for the family. Her liaison with Boozie means nothing since he is after all impotent, but it gives a vicious sadistic twist to Manu's relations with her. She escapes for a while to her parental home, and her mother's curse echoes still, and the ghosts of the past will not leave her in peace. She strips herself of her self-deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive illusions, and Shashi Deshpande's language itself flickers like a candle, and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Sarita cannot forget her children, or the sick needing her expert attention; and so she decides to face her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can open up a new spring of elemental self-confidence:

All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings . . . they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk.

Two short novels, traditional in cast, *The Blood Red Bangles* (1976) and *The Monument* (1977), both by 'Ahmed M. Akhtar' (Ahmed Mohiuddin): the latter takes us back to the 'Mutiny' of 1857, while the former recalls life in the early 1920's. Safdar the hero of *The Monument* and Zahira the heroine of the other novel are alike cast in the role of 'silent sufferer', and both rise to heights of self-sacrifice. The social scene is etched with vividness in both novels, and the friendship between Syed Ali and Mohan Das, and between Safdar and Bagh Singh, are pointers to the communal amity that normally governed the life of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the country. In Sharf Mukaddam's *When Freedom Came*, Fakir a boy from Konkan comes to Bombay and joins the Muslim National Guard (MNG); Kesho, also from Konkan, is a Hindu

militant; Shanker, Kesho's nephew and Fakir's friend and neighbour, had been breast-fed as a child by Fakir's mother! The action of the novel sways between the Konkan village and Bombay, and extremist or communalist politics comes as a sword to cut and sever. But in spite of everything, Fakir and Shanker remain friends till the end.

Some more novelists, though what is said here can only be a whirl of names, titles and dates! Romen Basu's *A Gift of Love* (1977), about Sukumal's life in Liverpool and London, return to India, and marriage to a 'low caste' servant-maid, Kajali, and *Portrait on the Roof* (1980), about Dilip of the Mitra clan and Teresa of the Luciano clan (Bologna) meeting in Trafalgar Square, and slipping into friendship and marriage: Deepchand C. Becharry's *That Others Might Live* (1976), set in Mauritius, a tale of immigrants, and exploitation, and police tyranny, centering round the life of Manish and his 3-year (1871-4) stay: Shouri Daniels's *The Salt Doll* (1979), the story of a Syrian Christian girl Mira's married life with a brahmin, Mira being the 'salt doll', actor and narrator both, and using uninhibited language: H.S. Gill's *Ashes and Petals* (1978), about Ajit Singh a child of post-partition India, who dies in the war against Pakistan prelude the birth of Bangla Desh, the narrator being a railway driver, Antony, who evokes also the sufferings of the refugees: Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* (1976), a historical novel that attempts a rehabilitation of Tipu as man and ruler: Shyam Dave's *The Kumbh Docket* (1972), an Indo-Anglian variation of the James Bond spy-yarn using pseudo-science and pseudo-history, the whole conspiracy directed towards killing tens of thousands through the release of radio-isotopes at the time of the Kumbh Mela: S. Gopalan's *Jackal Farm* (1974), an entertaining yarn with a sociological slant: K.D. Khosla's *Never the Twain* (1981), in which Krishen Lal Seth, in his seventies, reminisces about his "love for Marion, hers for me", and why it couldn't progress to register fulfilment: Akhileswar Jha's *The Janapath Kiss*, on Sadananda an Executive Engineer and Meera a career woman: D.R. Mankekar's *No, my Son, Never!*, on the more unsavoury side of journalism in India by a seasoned journalist: Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Bimal in Bog* (1972), translated from his own Hindi, a fantastic and unconventional novel in theme as well as language: Uma Vasudev's *The Song for Anasuyu* (1978), reeking

with sex-thought, sex-talk and sex-act, about the 'heroine' who is a silly slut and Priti a moron; and Veena Paintal's *Midnight Woman* (1979). And Gopalan's *Tryst with Destiny* (1981) pictures the Gandhian struggle, Netaji's INA, the coming of freedom and Gandhiji's martyrdom.

There are short story writers too, several of whom are novelists as well. R.K. Narayan's *A Horse with Two Coats*, figuring memorable characters like Muni and Annamalai and *Malgudi Days* (1982), both collections bringing out Narayan's compassionate realism and innate feeling for justice and sense of humour at their best; Manohar Malgonkar's *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974) and *Rumble-Tumble* (1977); Anita Desai's *Games at Twilight* (1978); Arun Joshi's *The Survivor* (1975); Manoj Das's *The Crocodile Lady* (1975), a collection of 18 stories in his inimitable mature style; A.D. Gorwalla's *The Queen of Beauty* (1973); Shiv K. Kumar's *Beyond Love* (1980); Kamala Das's *A Doll for the Child Prostitute*; Savitri Khanna's *Prejudice of Ages* (1980), some of the stories, like the title-piece, on the tyranny of caste consciousness, and others on life's startling ironies and unthinking cruelties; Shashi Deshpande's *The Legacy* (1978), Raji Narasimhan's *The Marriage of Bela* (1978), Juliette Banerjee's *The Boyfriend* (1978) and Dina Mehta's *The Other Woman* (1981). Raji, Shashi and Juliette all three write about the tears in things, the little upsets in life, the price one has to pay for one's acute self-awareness, and the loneliness that becomes more pronounced as one gets older and older. As for Dina Mehta, she is a good story-teller with a talent for creating the desired mood and convoluting the characters as wanted. When the wife finds that her husband loves another, she becomes an adulteress too. Just tit for tat, all the carrom coins getting into the appropriate slots. In 'Absolution', Dina could at least have spared a deliberate desecration of the Sita-Rama ideal by not giving these very names to her erring protagonists. Again, in 'Prison', the ideal of chastity and motherhood receives a slap in the face. Gauri withdraws from the chance of an extra-marital affair, but it is damned as a failure. And stories like 'The Fastidious Housewife' and 'Initiation Rites' move on similar rails. And yet Dina Mehta has undoubted talent which shows to advantage in 'The Other Woman' touched with genuine humour and 'The Tree', a glistening silk thread drawn out of humdrum urban Bombay.

VII

NON-FICTION PROSE

Non-fiction prose is a basket that bulges with variety: history, biography, autobiography, belles-lettres, translation, travelogue, literary criticism, journalism, oratory, all the miscellaneous 'notes', in fact, of the 'other harmony'. Of the several thousand books in English that appear every year, a vast majority—text books, guide books, boost books, Government publications, popular handouts—are written in poor pedestrian prose, and it is always easier to accomplish mediocrity (or worse) than aim at excellence. The more serious works distinguished by their structural sense and stylistic flavour are not as many as one would hope for. But certainly there is considerable activity, which is after all a necessary prerequisite for the occurrence in course of time of works of outstanding merit.

A scholarly, comprehensive and readable resume of Indian history appears but once in a way, and to this class belongs D.P. Singhal's *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India* (1972) in 2 volumes. There is here neither blind adoration nor ideological denigration. The consummate marshalling of facts and the kindling of them with the life-spark make the narrative compellingly evocative of India's living past. Again, K.D. Sethna's *The Problem of Aryan Origins* (1981) and *Karpāsa in Pre-Historic India* (1982) are sustained attempts to re-think the character of the several phases of India's career in pre-historic times. Sethna, a sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, is a polymath—scholar, poet, critic, student of history and philosophy—and his hard-headed inquiries are recorded in precise and forceful language, and must stimulate further research in this field.

The two most explosive events during the seventies were the Indo-Pakistan war leading to the emergence of free Bangla Desh and the imposition of the Emergency in 1975 followed by the Janata victory in 1977. Of the many books that appeared covering the Bangla tragedy, one of the most moving is Amita Malik's *The Year of the Vulture* (1972) recapitulating the 9 months' agony and bestiality and heroism, from the night of 25 March 1971 when Tikka Khan let loose infernal horror in Dacca to mid-December

when the cold-blooded attempt was made to decimate the Bangla intellectuals just before the surrender of the Pakistan army. Amita Malik visited the refugees' camps in West Bengal, interviewed the victims of Pak fury and frenzy, felt the pulse of the resistance and the endurance and the glory, visited Dacca after the liberation in January 1972, saw the bloodstains, graveyards and heartbreak houses, saw the horror and the pity, heard the lingering reverberating groans, and visited Dacca again in May and saw the wounds healing but ever so slowly, and Mujibur Rahaman's Bangla Desh trying to move out of the dark tunnel into the light of a new Dawn. Amita Malik's record of the happenings has the smell of blood, and in the very rustle of the pages of her book one hears the cries of the children and the moans of the mothers. Alas, ten years after, and in the aftermath of the coups, the sores do not seem to have healed, and the stalemate in the subcontinent persists still.

As for the Emergency, many an 'instant' history came out after the phenomenal Janata victory in early 1977, and among the authors were V.K. Narasimhan, Janardhan Thakur, Kuldip Nayar, L.K. Advani and G.C. Mirchandani. Amiya and B.G. Rao's book was written *during* the Emergency, and this gives it a distinction and a power transcending efficient journalism. Kuldip Nayar's *The Judgement* (1977) too stands a little apart, for he too was a victim of the Emergency, and there is a pace in his writing that is rather breath-taking. The real but invisible protagonist of the drama is Bharat Mata, for it was her collective will that defeated the Emergency and put the country back on its democratic rails.

But of far greater significance is Jayaprakash Narayan's *Prison Diary 1975*, published in 1977. J. P. was no professional man of letters; neither was Gandhiji. Writing was part of J.P.'s armoury to fight injustice, corruption and ignorance. When he was suddenly spirited away to prison in the early hours of the fateful 26 June 1975, he merely said in dismay '*vināsakāle viparītabuddhi*'—a perverse mind preludes a time of destruction! A new darkness had descended upon the country, and J.P. was in solitary confinement, eating his heart out in benumbed silence. Then suddenly, on 21 July 1975, he began his Diary: "My world lies in a shambles all around me." It was by no means a detailed Diary; J.P. hadn't the means, he wasn't in the mood. He made his jottings, long or short,

spasmodically—as if under the compulsion of the prevailing climate within and without. And yet these less than 100 pages are like the ECG recordings of fallen prostrate semi-conscious Bharat Mata. J.P. incarnates the mood and mind and sensibility and soul and indomitable will of the nation. There is no surplusage, no intrusive anecdotage, no stimulated sound and fury, no perfervid evangelism. Yet in its quiet tones and bareness and utter sincerity, the Diary reads as a human and heroic document. What if a request for release even for doing flood-relief work meets only with a rebuff? J.P. is not embittered. Is he a 'failure', after all? May be, it is the sort of 'failure' that the world needs! Although it is but a random collection of jottings reflecting or recording a miscellany of moods and musings, J.P.'s personality flames on almost every page, and this fact galvanises the Diary with triumphant life.

India's Freedom Movement (1972) by B. Shiva Rao is journalistically competent enough, but fails to take life as a historical narrative. Ved Mehta's *Portrait of India* (1973) is merely clever and rather undependable. As P. Lal remarks (JIWE, Jan. 1974, pp. 20ff): "Mr. Mehta has been too long in the West, and his 'Indian' perceptions, rational and intuitive, have been damaged in the process . . . This *Portrait* lacks perspective. Most of it is Ved Mehta's impressionism, not our realism". Mehta's *Mamaji* (1977), an exercise in biography, is however a much more satisfying work, for here the deeper loyalties keep under effective check the surface smirk and smartness.

A very different kind of history is M.N. Srinivas's *My Remembered Village* (1976). This portrait of Rampura, a village near Mysore, is the result of the transcendence of the laboriously researched material accidentally lost in arson in 1970. The narrative is woven out of 'remembrance of things past', rather than reared upon card-indexed notes of day-to-day field experience. If something by way of factual authenticity is lost, what is gained is a unified sensibility. Rampura is a particular and unique village with its pattern of inter-caste relationships and its complex of human affiliations, groupings and estrangements. A variegated and rich tapestry unfolds before the reader, but one can see behind the uniqueness the universality as well, for Rampura is a microcosm of the Indian village-world, and it sometimes recalls Raja Rao's Kanthapura. Almost every rift is loaded with the ore of revived memories, and

the whole book takes on the character of a seeking for roots, or establishing the deeper links of Indian humanity. *My Remembered Village* is no doubt an authentic piece of ethnography; it is also a warm-hearted piece of writing marked by clarity and candour and conviction.

In Biography, a few titles are worth more than a passing mention. The best of them is Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of the Rt. Hon. F. Max Muller* (1974), which secured next year the Sahitya Akademi annual prize. Max Muller is a subject after Nirad Chaudhuri's heart. The hero as scholar, as dedicated researcher, as the writer who spurns delights and lives laborious days, as the mountaineer whose Everest is the crown of literary achievement, the campaigner who aims at conquering only a cultural continent, has always claimed Chaudhuri's admiration, and Max Muller certainly belonged to that noble breed, he was the 'scholar extraordinary', the man with wide-awake literary sympathies, the adventurer who sleuthed after literary treasures, the tireless evangelist of India's ancient spiritual heritage. Chaudhuri spent 4 years collecting material for this biography in England, and the result is impressive. He keeps his own assertive ego reasonably in the background, and lets Max Muller himself fill the pages. There is a gripping recital of the main events of Max Muller's life, his Oxford years especially, of his great edition of the Rig Veda, of his general editorship of the Sacred Books of the East, and of his many assignments and achievements in the academic world. He survived his failure to be elected the Boden Professor, and Chaudhuri makes us see how Max Muller, although he never visited India, understood the mind and heart and soul of India better than many of her own purblind children. Certainly a 'scholar extraordinary', but a man too compact of goodness and greatness; and the scholar and the man both come out alive in the pages of the biography.

Manohar Malgonkar's *The Sea-hawk* (Life and Battles of Kanhoji Angrey) and *The Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971) are both creditable efforts in historical biography. Malgonkar is endowed with the three requisites of a historian: a dispassionate view of the movement of events, an intuitive perception of the quiddities of character through the veils of voluminous records, and a talent for lively narrative. He has made good use of the available archival material, and has himself helped to discover

many historical facts relevant to the period. Selecting his matter judiciously and intelligently, Malgonkar has now brought to life the gilded royalty, its inhibitions and escapades, its intrigues and aberrations, its moments of generosity and gyrations of ambition. The portrait of Kanhoji Angrey and the portrait gallery of the Chhatrapatis of Kolhapur will remain laudable exhibits in Indo-Anglian historical biography.

Gokhale: The Indian Moderates and the British Raj (1977) by B. R. Nanda is the biography of a great political sannyasi and humanist and nation-builder. Gokhale the educationist, the leader of the Moderates, the seasoned legislator, the ardent social reformer, the inspiration and driving force behind the Servants of India Society, the bridge-builder between India and Britain—all these facets are brought out with a wealth of authentic documentation. The vicissitudes of the struggle between the Moderates whom Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta led and the Nationalists whom Tilak and Sri Aurobindo led are traced in these pages, and the biographer seems to take a more or less anti-Tilak stand. But while the recital of the events is orderly and the exercises in portraiture are commendable, the writing is on the whole undistinguished, and there is neither convincing psychological probing of the characters in action nor evocation of a whole nation on the move.

Among other historical biographies of some distinction are V. B. Karnik's *M. N. Roy* (1980), Krishna Kripalani's *Dwarkanath Tagore: A Forgotten Pioneer* (1980), and M. Chalapathi Rau's *Gobind Ballabh Pant: His Life and Times* (1981). Karnik and Chalapathi Rau knew their heroes quite well, and Krishna Kripalani, having already written authoritatively about Rabindranath, was lured to research about his great grandfather, Dwarkanath, and the result is a fascinating portrait of a leader and a man.

Rajaji, one of the major architects of modern India, is the subject of the 2-volume *Rajaji: A Study of His Personality* (1976) by Masti Venkatesa Iyengar and of *The Rajaji Story: A Warrior from the South* (1978) by Rajmohan Gandhi. Masti's is an unconventional biography, yet succeeds in bringing to life the greatness and manifoldness of Rajaji's personality. Besides briskly surveying Rajaji's life and giving the substance of his views on politics, religion, planning, socialism, the welfare state, official language,

and nuclear proliferation, the volumes throw light also on his genius for friendship with special reference to his unblemished life-long feeling for Navaratna Rama Rao, and for Masti as well. Rajaji's sense of humour, his tact, his skill in debate, his inconsistencies, his practical religion, his courtesy, his many exemplary roles on the theatre of life, his high sense of duty, his unfailing charm of manners, his beautiful calligraphy, his Gandhian ministry, his luminous thinking, his deep wisdom and his innate godliness—all these marks of his power and personality find brief recordation in Masti's pages. Rajmohan Gandhi's volume reviews Rajaji's life upto 1937, the later periods, 1937-1954 when he was in and out of office, and 1954-1972 when he articulated political dissent in a grand way and transcended it too with his elder statesmanship, are to be covered in the later volumes. Although as Rajaji's grandson, Rajmohan may have had inhibitions about probing motives and making assessments, his industry, integrity and love, his concern for facts and his sense of order and organisation, have contributed to the success of this biography.

Official or authorised biographies, whether Rajmohan's on Rajaji or S. Gopal's on Jawaharlal Nehru, or the many that have appeared in the Government-sponsored Builders of Modern India series, have their uses as well as limitations. Again, the publication in 1972 of the first volume of the Dictionary of National Biography, edited by S.P. Sen of the Institute of Historical Studies, was a significant event, and the project is to be completed in 4 volumes. The personalities of the last 200 years figure in the pages, and in planning and execution alike, it is a monumental and useful publication, and several of the entries read like excellent biographies in brief. Of portraits in miniature, M. Chalapathi Rau's in *All in All* (1981) are scintillating like all his best work. There is less bite now than in the 'Skinned Alive' series of almost 50 years ago, but there is more to ponder over. While some of the pieces are out of date, others like those on Sri Aurobindo, Rajaji, C.V. Raman and J.P. convey much in little space.

Autobiography has become a favourite literary form with the Indo-Anglians. Everyone is an authority on himself; and, besides, the success of the autobiographies of Gandhiji, Nehru and Nirad Chaudhuri has tempted many others also to spread themselves out on the printed page. *My Dateless Diary* by R.K. Narayan, with

its self-determined limitations, has achieved a vogue of its own. But Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976), with its uninhibited revelation of her feelings and experiences, like her disastrous novel *Alphabet of Lust*, merely caused a brief sensation. More serious in intent are Frank Moraes's *Witness to an Era* (1973), a lively experiment in backward-glancing comprising 40 years of British rule and 25 years of independence, and including in its scope Goa and Oxford and India and the world, and memories of political processes and personalities. Kasturi Sreenivasan's *Climbing the Coconut Tree* (1980) is a partial record recalling his childhood and boyhood years in a village near Coimbatore, and bringing out the loyalty to one's family and caste, pride in one's people and homestead, and the general ethos of village life. Minoo Masani's *Bliss was it in that Dawn* (1977) recalls some of his experiences of the Gandhian Heroic Age when to be young was very Heaven! Justice M.C. Chagla's *Roses in December* (1973) is a fascinating self-portrait of a scholar, educationist, jurist and statesman, and is written with candour, clarity and charity. Urmila Haksar's *The Future that Was* (1972) throws a revealing light on the political, economic and social scene in pre-Independence Kashmir and India. *A Princess Remembers* (1982) is Maharani Gayatri Devi's book of memories transcribed with the assistance of Shanta Rama Rau. Prakash Tandon's *Return to Punjab* (1980) reveals the same qualities that contributed to the success of his *Punjabi Century* earlier, and H.D. Sethna's *The Mind's Journey* (1978) is a sensitive exercise in inner bridge-building between the hitherside and the future. In Apa Pant's *A Moment of Time* (1974), we make the acquaintance of an unconventional diplomat and learn of his varied experiences. Hailing from the princely house of Aundh in Maharashtra, Apa Pant had his education in UK and became his own State's elected Chief Minister. After the integration of the States, Nehru sent Apa Pant as India's Representative to East Africa and later to other countries in Asia and Europe, and so he became a part of all that he met:

It has been fun, and it has been satisfying to be an African in Africa, a Tibetan in Tibet, a Bhutanese in Bhutan, an Indonesian in Indonesia, an Arab (in Cairo), a Norwegian, a Briton, an Italian—and at the same time to be able to remain an Indian, and a link in the chain of understanding and friendship.

While Apa Pant was duly concerned with the outer political happenings, at a deeper level he was also seized with the First and Last questions, with life, death and immortality, with the metaphysical aura of some personalities, and with the transcendence of matter and temporal events by the spirit. And his encounters with the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama and other sages were of particular importance in the shaping of Apa Pant's personality.

A very different kind of book is Mulk Raj Anand's *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (1981). These informal talks took place over 50 years ago when Anand was a student of philosophy and (in his own words) "an electric, miscellaneous and unconventional romantic", and among the participants were the now celebrated figures, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Bonamy Dobree and C.E.M. Joad. An age—a vanished age—seems to have been brought back to life in these pages, for the conversations are compulsive, vivid and sparkling, and seem to be touched with fidelity to the speaker and the moment, and one almost *sees* the speakers and animated features. Reading the book is like participating in a kaleidoscopic conference of poets, novelists, critics, philosophers, artists, editors, rebels, diehards—and sometimes as though more than one is talking at once. There is, besides, the thrill of encounter between the East and West, India and Britain.

'Belies lettres' is an omnibus term, and can cover a variety of prose writing. Nirad Chaudhuri's *To Live or Not to Live* (1970), like his earlier *The Intellectual in India* (1967), is polemical, pontifical, stimulating, irritating and challenging all at once. Chaudhuri's crotchets are by now well known, but beneath the brilliance of the writing and the pointed satire, there is also a deep concern for values. His aim is to probe the causes of human unhappiness in India and to suggest remedies. While the book lacks the tightness of structure or consistency of tone of his best work, his wit, knowledge, experience and courage make the volume provocatively enjoyable. Jayaprakash Narayan's *A Revolutionist's Quest* (1980), comprising selected writings edited by Bimal Prasad, covers a wide spectrum of interests, and the nationalist, socialist, Sarvodaya leader, prophet of total revolution and unrepentant humanist, all the facets in fact of J.P.'s many-splendoured life and message, find recordation in this substantial and seminal volume.

Sisirkumar Ghose's *Modern and Otherwise* (1975) is a collection of 23 essays by a keen literary critic and ardent Aurobindonian revelling in a cross-fertilisation of ideas drawn from different disciplines and areas of discourse; Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's *Of Law and Life* (1980) gives ample evidence of his wide-spread interests that go beyond politics and law, his originality of approach and lightning insights, and the intrepidity and incandescence in his use of English; *Evolving Reality* (1978) by M.P. John, a journalist with a sense of mission, is a modest collection of essays presenting the personality of Jesus, not only as the supreme apostle of love, but also as the prophet of a humanity evolving from the 'animality' of yesterday towards the summits of a possible divinity tomorrow; and, a book of a very different kind, *Karma Cola* (1980) by Geeta Mehta, expatiates breezily on the pseudo-spiritual trade between India's 'god-men' and their Western acolytes, and is written with a no-holds-barred freedom and a style that is a cross between studied smartness and wit on the one hand and a reckless slipshodness on the other. There are also the journalists who contribute to the national press or to magazines like *Mainstream* and *Economic and Political Weekly*, and their powers of exposition and analysis are matched by their mastery of the medium. Aside from veterans like S. Mulgaokar, M. Chalapathi Rau and V.K. Narasimhan, there are several others: Kuldip Nayar, S. Nihal Singh, M.V. Kamath, B.G. Verghese, Arun Shourie, Romesh Thapar, Rajni Kothari, A. G. Noorani, Amiya Rao, and a few more that write with knowledge, commitment and fearlessness.

Finally, Literary Criticism: but, as Allen Tate once remarked, like the Kingdom of God on earth, literary criticism is both "perpetually necessary and, in the very nature of its middle position between imagination and philosophy, perpetually impossible". There was a time when nobody, or hardly anybody, cared to look at Indo-Anglian writing, and very few indeed felt drawn to serious literary criticism. The elevation of Indian Writing in English as an academic discipline, the current Ph.D. compulsions, the prestige attached to publications by university and college teachers, the frequency of literary seminars and conferences, and the proliferation of literary periodicals have altered the situation a good deal. But now the danger is that 'Lit. Crit.' might degenerate into an industry (Private) Limited (or Unlimited). The bulk of our criticism

and the quality of production of our critical studies and monographs are thus apt to suffer by international standards: and our university presses, although liberally financed by the UGC, being also hamstrung by red tape and lack of professionalism, fail to deliver the goods.

It is against this unpromising background that one has to view the work of those seasoned scholars and critics, or of the disciplined newer practitioners, who justify the profession of criticism. The late Niharranjan Ray's *An Artist in Life* (1967), a commentary on Tagore's life and work, received the Sahitya Akademi award, but Ray's interests transcended literature, and embraced Art, history, religion and philosophy. His *Idea and Image in Indian Art* (1973) is a perceptive study of Indian sculpture exploring (in his own words) "the nature and character of the relation between idea and image, both in a process of change through time, under the stress of situations which were socio-religious and ideological as much as aesthetic and technical". Ray gives a fascinating account of the way the sculptor's aim and technique changed in response to the vicissitudes of time and history, and how the sculptor stood in relation to inert stone his recalcitrant medium as Purusha to Prakriti, the finished piece of sculpture being the sublimation and fulfilment of his artistic sadhana.

The late Taraknath Sen was a scholar and critic sui generis, although he actually published little in his lifetime. His posthumous *A Literary Miscellany* (1972), however, gives abundant proof of his taste for letters, his keen sensibility and his feeling for the English language. In his introductory memoir, S.C. Sen Gupta describes Taraknath's critical method as being marked by imaginative vitality, intellectual subtlety and felicity of expression and a "comprehensive capacity for total experience of literature". The largest of the 14 essays is the dissertation on Shakespeare's 'short lines', and Taraknath shows with a wealth of illustrative quotation and flashes of divination that Shakespeare's short lines, far from being blemishes or the fall-out of hurry or carelessness, are verily among the beauties of Shakespeare's mature art. The 'Miscellany' also includes essays on Lamb, Wordsworth, Keats, Shaw, Tagore, on the nunnery scene in *Hamlet* and (surprisingly enough) a note on Balasaraswati's 'Bharata-natyam'. Another tall Shakespearian is S.C. Sen Gupta, whose *Aspects of Shakespearian Tragedy* (1972),

more or less in the Bradleyan tradition, adds up with his earlier volumes on the comedies and the Historical Plays, and the later *A Shakespeare Manual* (1977) to a formidable corpus of Shakespeare criticism. In collaboration with Henry W. Wells, H.H. Anniah Gowda has published *Shakespeare Turned East* (1976) on the 'last' plays or 'romances' and *Style and Structure in Shakespeare* (1979), a comprehensive study of "both the form and the content" of the plays, with significant glances at the theory and practice of Sanskrit drama. Anniah Gowda's critical writings include *The Revival of English Poetic Drama* (1972) and *Dramatic Poetry from Medieval to Modern Times* (1973). As for Milton studies, M.V. Rama Sarma is our most dedicated Miltonist: his earlier books, on *Paradise Lost* and Heywood respectively, have been followed by *The Heroic Argument* (1971), *The Eagle and the Phoenix* (1976), a study of *Samson Agonistes*, and the comprehensive monograph on Milton, *Things Unattempted* (1981).

Culture and Creativity (1969) and *Golden Harvest* (1977) are two courses of lectures given by K. Chandrasekharan as Tagore Professor in Madras University. Literature is seen as being wholly involved in life, and present-day life is a precarious looking at the future, dreading the unthinkable yet waiting on Grace. To be truly cultured is to be able to face the whole horror of the present, and it is in this sense that culture is creativity and self-transcendence. The 9 lectures of the second series consider subjects like the Poetic View of Life, the Higher Truth of imaginative fiction, and Freedom for the artist. 'Life' is the subject of poetry, 'language' is the medium; but the real subject is the noumena behind the phenomena, and this is to be conveyed through *seeing* speech. The world of fiction is "a universe complete and comprehensive". Chandrasekharan points out that, although political and economic freedom is necessary, it is not enough; and the freedom for the artist begins where other freedoms end, and the artist's freedom is doubled with the paramount compulsions of his inner discipline.

Of a younger generation, M.K. Naik has critical studies of Maugham (1966), Raja Rao (1972) and Mulk Raj Anand (1973) to his credit, and he has edited (sometimes in collaboration with S. Mokashi-Punekar or S. K. Desai) a number of volumes of critical essays by Indian scholars: *Critical Essays in IWE*, *The Image of India in Western Creative Writing*, *Aspects of Indian Writing in*

English (1979), *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English* (1977) and *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English* (1982). In *Mighty Voices* (1980), Naik turns to T.S. Eliot. The critic is left out, but this makes it easier for Naik to concentrate on the creative writer. The comparative study of 'Gerontion' and Wallace Stevens's 'Sunday Morning' is rewarding, and the links between 'Four Quartets' and the Gita are once again scrutinised to good purpose. And Naik shows in his concluding essay how the entire corpus of Eliot's creative writing is a seamless web, an "essential unity". Other recent studies of Eliot's poetry are J. Birje-Patil's *Beneath the Axle-Tree* (1976) and G. Nageswara Rao's *The Epic of the Soul* (1978), a critique of 'Four Quartets'. Another promoter of Indian critical writing is C.D. Narasimhaiah, whose literary seminars and quarterly journal, *The Literary Criterion*, have encouraged scholars to present papers and have them published. Narsimhaiah's own critiques on Nehru, Gandhi, F.R. Leavis and Raja Rao, his studies in *The Swan and the Eagle*, and his introductions to the volumes he has edited (the most recent being *Commonwealth Literature: Problems of Response*, 1981) indicate the range of his critical interests. The proliferation, almost on a global scale, of Indo-Anglian studies has encouraged the publication of collections of critical essays and seminar papers, for example: *Indo-English Literature*, edited by K.K. Sharma, 1977; *Indian Writing in English*, edited by Ramesh Mohan, 1978; *English and India*, edited by M. Manuel and K. Ayyappa Paniker, 1978; *The Flute and the Drum: Studies in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry and Politics*, edited by V.A. Shahane and M.N. Sarma, 1980. 'The Indian Writers', a series of critical monographs edited by C.D. Narasimhaiah, and 'Kerala Writers in English' edited by Ayyappa Paniker, are other straws in the wind of change in Indo-Anglian criticism. Also worthy of mention are V.K. Gokak's *Studies in Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1972) and *Coleridge's Aesthetics* (1975); Chaman Nahal's *The Narrative Pattern in Ernest Hemingway's Fiction* (1971); D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu's *The Critical Response* (1980); A.V. Krishna Rao's *The Indo-Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition* (1972) and *Nayantara Sahgal* (1976); Raji Narasimhan's *Sensibility under Streets* (1976), an attempt to pigeon-hole Indo-Anglian Fiction under the Age of Narayan and Raja Rao, Age of Anita Desai and Age of Timeri Murari; Meenakshi Mukherjee's *The Twice-Born Fiction* (1971);

B. Ramchandra Rao's *The Novels of Anita Desai* (1979); Uma Parameswaran's *A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists* (1976); C.V. Venugopal's *The Indian Short Story in English* (1975); S.K. Prasad's *The Literary Criticism of Sri Aurobindo* (1974); P.V. Rajyalakshmi's *The Lyric Spring: A Study of the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu* (1977); Chirantan Kulshreshta's *Graham Greene* (1977); Sant Singh Bal's *George Orwell: The Critical Imagination* (1981); G. Nageswara Rao's *Encounter with Nothing*, on the modern Absurd Theatre (1979); Jasbir Jain's *Henry Derozio* (1981); T.R.S. Sharma's *Robert Frost's Poetic Style* (1981); and Margaret P. Joseph's *Kamala Markandaya* (1982). Comparative criticism has also come into prominence, as for example in V. Satchidanandam's *Whitman and Bharati* (1978); S. Ramakrishnan's *The Epic Muse, a study of Kamban and Milton*, 1977; S.P. Prasad's *Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence* (1976); Rajendra Verma's *Man and Society in Tagore and Eliot* (1982); Prema Nandakumar's *Dante and Sri Aurobindo* (1981) and Subhas Sircar's *Yeats and Eliot* (1978). Of particular interest is the background study, G.A. Reddi's *Indian Writing in English and Its Audience* (1979), while T.V. Subba Rau's *English Literature and the Indian Mind* (1980) in an all-out attack on the lack of standards of scholarship, criticism and teaching, and the fall-out of all this on our social and cultural life. On the linguistic side, a reference may be made to *Experimentation with Language in English*, Studies in Anand, Narayan, Malgonkar, Markandaya, Raja Rao, and their lexical and syntactical practice, edited by S.K. Desai (1972).

And finally, since the comprehensive Bibliography at the end of the second edition of *Indian Writing in English* (1973), other bibliographies, printed or mimeographed, have become available:

1. *A Bibliography of Indian English*, CIEFL, Hyderabad, 1972.
2. *Indian Literature in English: An Information Guide* (1827-1977), edited by Amritjit Singh, et al., (Detroit, 1977).
3. *Bibliography of Indo-English Literature: 1800-1966*, edited by John A. and Leena Karkala (Bombay, 1974).
4. *Indian Writing in English: A Concise Bibliography of Secondary Sources*, edited by Anand Kumar Raju and C.R. Sundar Raj (Bombay 1981).

It may also be mentioned that journals exclusively devoted to current literature—like the *Indian Book Chronicle* edited by Amrik

Singh and the *Book Review* edited by Prava Banerji—carry review-articles as well as reviews in brief, mobilising the services of numerous scholars and critics. The literary pages of the national (English) press carry reviews, interviews with writers, and reports of seminars and conferences. At the annual meetings of the All-India English Teachers' Conference (the 33rd is to be held in December 1982 in Delhi), papers are read and discussed, and a good deal of interest is generated in English studies generally, and particularly in Indian writing in English. Besides, the practice of presenting *Festschriften* to scholars of eminence has helped to bring together learned papers and essays in criticism by friends and admirers of the savants honoured. Seminal essays by seasoned and sensitive critical minds like V.Y. Kantak haven't been collected so far, but may be located in such *Festschriften*, and conference and seminar proceedings. The climate for scholarship, research and criticism, then, is not altogether unpromising, and one can legitimately entertain a reasonably fair hope for the future.

A last word. The Indo-Anglian writer and the Indo-Anglian critic are alike caught in a Janus-faced predicament. They are concerned with the 'Indianness' of Indian Writing in English, and this is natural enough; and they are equally anxious to measure IWE by the best English (or Anglo-American) standards. In the course of a review, Shyam Ratna Gupta remarked some years ago (*Indian and Foreign Review*, 1 July 1975, p. 24):

This overwhelming concern with the 'Indianness' of Indian fiction on the one hand and an equally obsessive anxiety to find parallels with modern English fiction writers underline an ambivalent trend, a kind of schizophrenic trait or alienation of literary criticism in India.

I do not think this criticism is very valid. Judging usually involves the application of a two fold standard, the local and the universal, the temporal and the timeless. We like to see a thing in its uniqueness as also in its relatedness to a wider spectrum. A character, a situation, can be recognisably Indian, and yet call to memory something similar (not identical) in another part of the world. For example, L.H. Myers's *The Near and the Far* is a picture of Mughal India; it is also a picture of England during the long week-end between the two world wars; and it sends out its fraternal vibrations to Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*. Ours is a 'bootstrap'

universe, a single web of intricate relationships, and it is the task of the critic to infer and indicate the underlying correspondences, filiations and communication networks.

It is no doubt true that some writers, in their choice of themes and their handling of the English medium, have a foreign audience in mind. There are others who speak of 'Indian English' as an absolute. Bengali is spoken and written in India as well as Bangla Desh, and Urdu both in India and Pakistan; but we don't speak of 'Indian Bengali' or 'Indian Urdu', but only of Bengali and Urdu. Conrad didn't write 'Polish English', anymore than Yeats wrote 'Irish English'. Of course, the regional Indian languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam; Hindi, Urdu; Sindhi, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Marathi, Gujarati; Bengali, Assamese, Oriya) are lively and potent instruments of creative expression, and have rich traditions behind them, some more ancient than English. Thus Indian writing in English will aim only at a selective all-India (or prospectively a select global) audience, and in the process may lose some of the intensities and graces possible in the regional literatures. Indian Writing in English will have its own aims and ardours and rewards, but because it cannot be what Marathi is to a Maharashtrian, Telugu to an Andhra, or French to a Frenchman, it needn't therefore become a second-hand or fraudulent phenomenon. And now as before, the Indo-Anglian will find it stimulating as well as profitable to keep in touch (to the extent possible) with English writing in UK, USA, Canada, Australia and other Commonwealth countries like Nigeria, and will yet try to invest his writing with the distinctive feel and force and soul of Indian sensibility, as already the best practitioners of the last 150 years have done with such vitality, variegated competence and trembling universality. And perhaps, when a breakthrough in our Mind takes place as revolutionary as the breaking of the Atom and the cracking of the genetic Code, there will be witnessed an efflorescence in our creative writing as well:

The Word, a mighty and inspiring Voice,
Enters Truth's inmost cabin of privacy
And tears away the veil from God and life.

(*Savitri*, X, iv)

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